

Spare the Sudanese

Egypt is determined the Sudanese people will not pay for the crimes of their rulers. Hoda Tawfik reports from New York

Chirac visit

PRESIDENT Jacques Chirac of France begins today his first official trip to the Middle East since being elected last May. Chirac is due to arrive in Lebanon today for a three-day visit, then head to Egypt where he is expected to hold talks with President Hosni Mubarak on the peace process in the Middle East. He will be accompanied by the French ministers of foreign affairs, economy and finance, education and health.

During his visit to Egypt, Chirac and Mubarak will inaugurate the new state-of-the-art Qasr El-Ain Teaching Hospital. The joint Egyptian-French project took 11 years to complete and cost LE750 million. France provided technical and financial assistance for the building of the hospital.

Hopes fade

SYRIAN President Hafez Al-Assad and Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres have agreed that hopes are dwindling for a Syrian-Israeli peace accord being achieved this year — but for different reasons.

In a joint press conference with President Hosni Mubarak following talks in Damascus on Tuesday, Assad accused Israel of obstruction and failure to respect UN resolutions. He said that unless Israel adopted a new style of handling the negotiations based on respect for the dignity, borders, lands and sovereignty of all peoples in the Middle East, peace goals would not be achieved.

Peres, on the other hand, cited the lack of time and the complexities of the issues, especially that of water, as the main reasons for his pessimism.

High alert

ISRAELI security forces imposed tough security measures throughout Israel and troops were put on high alert on the northern border with Lebanon yesterday, at the start of the eight-day Jewish Passover holiday.

Supermarkets were crowded with last-minute shoppers, as troops guarded bus stops, shopping malls and outdoor markets in response to threats by Islamist militants to carry out more suicide attacks. Two of the four recent bombings occurred on Jerusalem buses.

Police set up surprise checkpoints on roads leading from the West Bank into Jerusalem. Israel has imposed a blockade since 25 February barring two million Palestinians from entering Israel.

Cairo signing

SOUTH AFRICAN Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo will arrive in Cairo later this month to put his country's signature to an African unclear-free zone treaty during a meeting to be hosted by Egypt for this purpose.

A statement issued by Nzo's office said his visit to Egypt was part of a Middle East tour which will include Libya, Tunisia and Iran.

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Members of the UN Security Council began informal consultations yesterday on a draft resolution, written mainly by Egypt, that calls for relatively mild diplomatic sanctions against the Khartoum government of Gen. Omar Al-Bashir. The 15-member council is taking action against Sudan for its failure to extradite to Ethiopia three Islamist militants accused of taking part in the abortive attempt on President Hosni Mubarak's life in Addis Ababa last June.

The draft, endorsed by the council's six non-aligned members, including Egypt, drops the economic sanctions and air and arms embargo proposed by Ethiopia in a previous draft resolution last week.

The non-aligned group had made it a point to drop any mention of economic sanctions "that could affect the lives of our brothers and sisters in Sudan", according to Egypt's UN ambassador, Nabil El-Arabi.

"Egypt cannot support economic sanctions against the Sudanese people," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "In view of the historical relationship between our two countries and two peoples, Egypt cannot inflict hardships on the Sudanese people."

The latest draft calls for:
— states to significantly reduce the number and level of staff at Sudanese diplomatic missions and consular posts and control the movement within their territory of the staff who remain.

— states to restrict the entry into, or transit through, their territory of members of the Sudanese government, officials of that government and members of the Sudanese armed forces.

— international and regional organisations not to convene any conferences in Sudan.

Mubarak escaped unharm when his motorcade came under fire shortly after his arrival in Addis Ababa on 26 June for a summit meeting of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

The Security Council, in a January resolution, gave Sudan a two-month moratorium to extradite to Ethiopia three Egyptian militants accused of executing or planning the assassination attempt.

The new draft also urges their immediate extradition and demands that Sudan desist from engaging in activities assisting, supporting and facilitating terrorism, and from giving sanctuary to terrorists.

El-Arabi said that despite its opposition to economic sanctions, Egypt was urging the world community to put more pressure on Sudan to extradite the three suspects.

The Ethiopian proposals, calling for an arms embargo and a ban on flights by Sudan Airways, the national char-

acter, accused of transporting one of the would-be assassins from Addis Ababa, followed the pattern of previous international action, such as that taken against Libya. Sanctions were imposed on Libya in 1992 for failing to extradite, to either Britain or the US, two men accused of the 1988 mid-air bombing of a Pan Am airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 270 people. Additional sanctions were imposed on Libya in 1993 because of its continued failure to comply.

Diplomats say that the United States favours the Ethiopian proposals for an arms and air embargo, while China and European states are hesitant to slap on sanctions that could lead to Sudan's disintegration in view of the civil war that has raged in the south for more than a decade. The Security Council appeared to be split into two camps: the first backing the embargoes and the second warning against the consequences of strong sanctions against a country suffering from a civil war, poverty and a deteriorating economy.

According to Reuters, US Ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright, at an informal meeting of non-aligned members of the council on Tuesday, chastised Egypt for the alleged weakness of its resolution.

Egyptian concern about the wider effects of further destabilisation in Sudan were voiced in Cairo on Tuesday.

An assistant foreign minister, Sayed Kassem El-Masri, told reporters that "Egypt opposed any economic or military sanctions against Sudan because it is concerned for Arab national security and the unity of Sudanese territory."

Sudan's military-dominated government has been fighting rebels in the southern part of the country, in a civil war that began in 1983.

"The Egyptian position is to increase the political pressures on the Sudanese regime so that it renounces terrorism and implements the resolution demanding the extradition of the suspects, without damaging the territorial unity of Sudan or adding to the suffering of the Sudanese people," Masri said.

A report submitted to the council by UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali asserted that five states visited by his special envoy — Egypt, Ethiopia, Uganda, Eritrea and Tunisia — had confirmed that Sudan was either involved in terrorist activity against them or supported terrorist activity and was giving safe haven to terrorists on its territory.

The report informed the council that Sudan had refused to comply with its requests for extraditing the three suspects and for desisting from supporting terrorist activity. (see Editorial, p.8)



BLESSED GATHERING: Throughout its 120-year history Al-Ahram Organisation has represented a source of knowledge for millions of readers. In pursuance of this role Al-Ahram's board chairman, Ibrahim Nafie, played host yesterday to a seminar on the role of religion in fighting illiteracy. The seminar was sponsored by Al-Ahram's Regional Press Institute, and the speakers were none other than the nation's two leading religious figures, the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, and Pope Shenouda III, head of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Amira Howeidy attended.

Describing the one-day seminar as a "blessed gathering" in "the service of our religion and nation," Sheikh Tantawi emphasised the importance Islam places on education and knowledge. "Anyone who reads the Holy Qur'an carefully will find that the word 'knowledge' and its synonyms are mentioned more than 300 times," Tantawi said. Islam's Holy Book urges the faithful to seek more knowledge and greater wisdom "and now, in the age of science, and at this gathering, attended by my dear brother Pope Shenouda, we believe that we are boosting our brotherly relationship for the purpose of disseminating knowledge."

Speaking to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Pope Shenouda drew attention to the role already played by the Coptic Orthodox Church in fighting illiteracy. More than 500 literacy centres have been established by the Church and some 8,300 people are taught to read and write every year while others are provided with vocational training, the Pope said. In his opening address Ibrahim Nafie characterised rampant illiteracy as both "a national disgrace and a religious sin that cannot be tolerated or forgiven". The seminar's objective, he said, was to "mobilise national capabilities for that most noble objective, the elimination of illiteracy."

Perry denies secret pact

Pledging "robust" security assistance to Egypt, US Defence Secretary William Perry yesterday denied reports of a secret US-Israel defence pact. Nevine Khali and Galal Nassar report

US Defence Secretary William Perry, who was met yesterday by President Hosni Mubarak, pledged that the already close security ties between the United States and Egypt will "continue to be stronger."

"The US sees Egypt as a keystone state in efforts to build a lasting peace in the Middle East and to achieve greater stability in Africa," Perry said after the 90-minute meeting. "The US will continue to provide robust security assistance to help Egypt remain secure, so that Egypt can continue its leadership in building regional security and peace."

Asked about a fresh threat by the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, to resume suicide bombings in Israel, Perry replied: "We certainly discussed the terrorist threat. We see the terrorist threat is designed to stop the peace process. This will hurt all of the nations in the region; it will hurt Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Syria, everybody and, therefore, it is important not to let this terrorist action stop the peace process."

Added Perry: "We discussed ways in which both Egypt and the US can be more effective in dealing with the terrorist threat. We also discussed ways in which other nations can work together." But the US official said he could not discuss details in public.

Perry denied "some media reports about a secret defence pact between the US and Israel. Those reports are simply wrong. They are not true," he said.

"It is not new that the US is committed to Israel's security but it is also not new that we are committed to peace and stability in the region. We are, therefore, also committed to the security of partners in the region, including Egypt. So, any consideration of security in this region has to consider Egypt as well as Israel," Perry said.

After the talks with Mubarak, Perry had what he described as a "very detailed discussion" with Defence Minister Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi "about the con-

tinuing military cooperation between Egypt and the US. There has been a successful programme, a robust programme... We do not have any significant problems," he said.

The talks with Tantawi focused on a planned Egyptian purchase of 21 US-made F-16 jet fighters as well as the possible sale of a third US frigate to Egypt. With US military aid to Egypt running at \$1.3 billion annually, Congress earlier approved the sale of two ships to this country.

The talks also dealt with an Egyptian request for greater flexibility in the disbursement of American aid and a renewed commitment by Washington to help Egypt achieve its strategic objective of phasing out antiquated Soviet equipment in its arsenal.

Perry later travelled to Ismailia to visit the headquarters of the second army and have a first-hand look at the first Egyptian brigade exclusively made up of advanced American M1-A1 battle tanks assembled in Egypt.

PNA clamps down on protest

Palestinian police fire into the air as the self-rule council meets for the first time on the West Bank

Palestinian police fired shots into the air yesterday to block 1,500 demonstrators from marching to the Palestinian parliament in protest against a crackdown by Yasser Arafat's security forces against Islamist militants.

The protesters, most of them university students, had reached downtown Ramallah — about a half hour walk from the building where the council had convened — when they were stopped by police, the Associated Press reported. There were no immediate reports of clashes or injuries.

Protesters said they wanted to deliver petitions to Arafat and the 88 council members to stop arrests of Islamist militants. Arafat's security forces have arrested some 900 people after the four suicide bombings in Israel.

Police also raided An-Najah University in the West Bank city of Nablus last weekend, firing tear gas and clubbing students. The raid sparked widespread anger among Palestinians.

The self-rule council, elected on 20 Jan-

uary, convened for the third time yesterday, its first session in the West Bank.

Violating promises to keep council sessions open, Arafat ordered reporters to leave the hall in an Education Ministry building a few minutes after the session started. He told legislators: "This session is secret and I didn't come to speak about politics."

The PLO-Israel autonomy agreement stipulates that all council meetings be open and that legislators must pass a special resolution if they want to keep the public out. The festive first session in Gaza City on 7 March was open to reporters but the media were banned from the second meeting.

Palestinian legislator Hanan Ashrawi, a civil rights activist, walked up to one of Arafat's senior security men yesterday and asked why reporters were not being allowed in.

"You just sit down and take your seat, and we will make the decisions," replied the man, who is known as Abu Saud.

The Voice of Palestine radio station re-

ported that the council was to discuss the composition of a future cabinet, but did not say whether Arafat would present names of ministers to the council.

Ramallah is a likely future seat of government because of its proximity to Jerusalem, though Arafat, whose headquarters are in Gaza at present, has not yet made a final decision on where to locate his administration. Arriving in Ramallah by helicopter, Arafat said that Israel's closure of the territories following the suicide bombings was a grave matter for the Palestinians. He described the five-week siege of Gaza and the West Bank as "a real disaster. It is a very serious situation."

But he was confident that the Palestinian people would direct their anger against Israel rather than his Palestinian National Authority. "They are not angry against the Authority; it's because of Israel's collective punishments," he said. But these words were challenged by the demonstrating students.

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Eyes on Dimona

Although a partial survey of the Sinai Desert has found no evidence of radioactive contamination, experts warn that Israel's aging Dimona reactor continues to pose a threat. **Omayyeh Abdel-Latif** investigates

Tests of soil, water and air samples carried out in the Sinai Desert by a team from the Egyptian Atomic Energy Authority have found no evidence of radioactive contamination. However, subterranean water — the most likely target of contamination — was not tested because the team did not have the necessary equipment.

The three-man inspection team travelled to Si-oi last week after an Israeli television programme disclosed that several tons of radioactive waste from the Dimona reactor had been placed in ancient containers and buried in the Negev Desert. The possibility of a leakage, particularly if the area was hit by an earthquake, was raised.

The team made a survey of Suez City, the road connecting Saint Catherine with El-Arish and the eastern section of the Sinai Desert. Using mobile laboratories and spectrometers, the team also took samples from the Gulf of Aqaba waters and shore sediments. "The results showed that the [radiation] level was close to normal. There was no evidence of contamination," reported Ahmed El-Qadi, head of the Nuclear Safety Authority.

But El-Qadi, as well as Hisham Fouad, head of the Atomic Energy Authority, warned that these results should not be considered final, because underground water had not been tested. "Any contamination resulting from nuclear

waste dumping is more likely to affect the subterranean water," Fouad explained.

El-Qadi focused on the recent seismic activity in the region. "The last earthquake, which hit the area in November, had its epicentre in the Gulf of Aqaba," he said. "Since then, there have been numerous aftershocks, and this increases the likelihood of radioactive leakage."

Both El-Qadi and Fouad urged that the Dimona reactor be inspected by experts from the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Despite Israeli denials, Jordanian environmentalists also expressed fears that the recurring aftershocks might have caused a leakage. "A ou-

clear leakage is a matter of serious concern for Israel's neighbours and it is about time that the international community took serious steps to declare the Middle East a nuclear weapon-free zone," commented Ahmed Obeidat, head of the Jordanian Environment Association.

In an ordinary session scheduled for next week, the Arab League Council is expected to discuss the leakage issue, at Palestine's request. The League said in a statement that the Dimona reactor "posed a serious threat to Arab security, water and environmental resources in the region as a whole, and particularly to the Palestinian people."

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa

ruled out any security cooperation with Israel as long as suspicions persist that Israel has nuclear warheads in its arsenal.

"There can be no regional security agreements while the imbalance inherent in the Middle East peace process persists... and as long as there is a suspected nuclear threat," Moussa said. "Unless these matters, particularly the nuclear situation, are rectified, there can be no movement towards security agreements."

In what he described as an "Egyptian message to whom it may concern," Moussa stated: "Egypt will not agree to a discussion of regional security cooperation as long as Israel continues to possess nuclear weapons."

More Brothers arrested

Police arrested 12 leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood as part of a continuing crackdown on the outlawed organisation. **Khaled Dawoud** reports

Security authorities arrested 12 leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood on Monday, charging that the outlawed organisation had acted to revive its clandestine activities and its connections with Islamist terrorist organisations. Those arrested include **Abul-Els Madi**, former deputy secretary-general of the Engineers' Syndicate, who spearheaded a recent attempt to establish a political party under the name of *Al-Wasat* (Centre). Although the Brotherhood sought to disassociate itself from the party, many analysts believe it was yet another attempt by the group to gain legal status.

The Interior Ministry charged in a statement that the Brotherhood had "acted to escalate its suspect activities which are bound to threaten domestic security and stability by maintaining connections with its international branches which provide it with material and propaganda support."

The ministry said the Brotherhood had also cooperated with the militant *Al-Gama'a* and *Jihad* organisations "in an attempt to regain control of professional syndicates, mosques, religious and charity societies." The group also plotted to "infiltrate the education sector with the aim of planting extremist ideology into the hearts of students" and to set up a women's organisation, also propagating extremism, the statement said.

Maamoun El-Hodeibi, the Brotherhood's spokesman, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he was shocked when he learned of the arrests, commenting: "Nothing at all has happened to justify these arrests. I am very surprised."

Others detained included university professors, two former members of parliament and a doctor. Among them was **Abdel-Hamid El-Ghazali**, a professor of economics at Cairo University, who had won membership of the council of Cairo University's Staff Club only two days earlier. According to Brotherhood sources, Ghazali had been banned by the authorities from leaving for London on Saturday.

Other detainees include **Mohamed Mahdi Akef** and **Hassan Gouda**, both members of parliament between 1987 and 1990. **Essam Hashish**, a professor at Cairo University's Faculty of Engineering, **Mohamed Badawi**, an education expert, **Gamal Abdel-Hadi**, a history professor, **Mahmoud Abu Raya**, a university professor in Mansoura and **Mustafa El-Ghoniemi**, a doctor. One of the 12, who is in poor health, was placed under house arrest.

In another development, the Supreme State Security Court sentenced three militants to death on Tuesday for killing three policemen in attacks in the southern province of Aswan in 1993.

The three were among 29 members of *Al-Gama'a* and *Al-Islamiya* accused of carrying out the attacks, in which two other policemen and four civilians were wounded.

Judge Salaheddin Badour postponed the verdicts against the 26 others accused, including five on the run, until 5 May.

The men sentenced to death are **Mohamed Abdel-Raouf El-Sayed**, 35, **Ayman Kamal Mohamed**, 21, and **Nasser Abdel-Karim**, 25.

About 70 militants have been condemned to death in the past two years. Forty-seven of them have been executed.

Syndicate enforces ethics code

THE PRESS Syndicate's Council, at a meeting on Monday night, decided to take disciplinary action against the chief editors of the newspapers *Al-Watan* and *Al-Dustour* for violating the ethics of journalism.

The meeting, under the syndicate's chairman **Ibrahim Nafie**, decided to refer **Mohamed Abdel-Aal**, editor-in-chief of *Al-Watan*, and **Mohamed Abdel-Raouf**, editor-in-chief of *Al-Dustour*, to a disciplinary board after receiving complaints from several journalists that he had "committed offences violating the ethics of the profession and the Press Code of Ethics."

The meeting also decided to refer **Ibrahim Eissa**, editor-in-chief of *Al-Dustour*, a newspaper that is licensed in Cyprus but with headquarters in Cairo, to another disciplinary board for committing similar violations. The Press Syndicate's Council said *Al-Dustour* had published an article on 27 March which used "language punishable by law" to attack a leading journalist.

The council said it took the two decisions to show its commitment to the principle "that the ethics of the profession should not be violated in any form" and vowed that "all transgressions will be confronted firmly and decisively."

The council said it was intent on preserving the freedom of the press while at the same time safeguarding the rights of individuals and society.

The council also decided to strip some journalists of the syndicate's membership "after it has been proved that they voluntarily took up other non-journalistic professions."

Three hours to save Sadat

A retired official says security authorities had three hours to save Anwar El-Sadat's life but a breakdown of communication thwarted their efforts. **Nevine Khalil** spoke to him

In a surprising disclosure made 15 years after President Anwar El-Sadat's assassination, **Fouad Allan**, a top security official at the time, divulged that the security authorities had three precious hours to save the late president's life, but failed because of a breakdown in communication.

Allan, former chief of the State Security Investigations Department, made the revelation in a recently published book, *The Brotherhood and I*, and later confirmed it in an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

He said the security authorities had infiltrated the underground *Jihad* organisation, officially blamed for the assassination, and an informer had alerted them of the plot just hours before Sadat was shot and killed while reviewing a military parade in the early afternoon of 6 October 1981 at Nasr City. However, the information could not be relayed in time to top security personnel at the parade ground.

Mohamed Idris, a retired police general who was duty officer at El-Sahel police station on the day of the assassination, recounts in the book how the informer had provided information about the assassination plot three hours ahead of the shooting. The informer also told Idris that he and his accomplices had instructions to take to the streets following Sadat's death, flying black banners emblazoned with the motto of the Islamic state.

Idris, a colonel at the time, was hesitant at first, and had questioned the authenticity of the information. But he decided to relay it to his immediate superior, Maj. Gen. **Radwan Mutaweh**, describing the informer as an "A1" source.

Mutaweh attempted to relay the information by radio to his own superior, Maj. Gen. **Fathi Qatta**, who was at the parade ground. But there was no response from Qatta's car radio, indicating that he and his assistants had left the car to watch the parade. He tried to contact another superior, Maj. Gen. **Elewa Zaher**, but was told that Zaher was exhausted, taking a rest and could not be disturbed.

Mutaweh then decided to send a "top secret" memo with a courier lieutenant to Qatta at the parade ground. But the courier was barred for entry to the grounds because Sadat had already arrived.

One of then Interior Minister **Nabawi Ismail**'s bodyguards later told Idris he saw the courier making frantic efforts to enter the ground. The bodyguard mistakenly thought the courier wanted a better view of the parade.

Allan learned of what had happened only later. When the investigation into Sadat's assassination was opened, he came across the informer who had been detained at his own request, so that his cover would not be blown. Allan passed on the information to then Interior Minister **Hassan Abu Basha** who was shocked by the revelation but did not pursue the matter further.

Abu Basha refused to comment on the disclosure, although he wrote an introduction to *The Brotherhood and I*, in which he admitted that he had not read the book before publication. Asked by the *Weekly* why he had not ordered an investigation, Abu Basha replied: "Conditions at the time were chaotic and tragic."

Allan told the *Weekly* that there should have been an investigation, if only to make people learn from their mistakes. "The Interior Ministry at the time pursued a political, rather than a security, line of action," he commented. He said that many mistakes were made toward the end of Sadat's era, information concerning political security was undervalued and treated lightly, and "laxity was the mood at the ministry." He conceded that this atmosphere was largely due to the influence of Sadat himself, who believed that the Islamist groups would never harm him.

However, he acknowledged that the Interior Ministry had been very successful in keeping the situation under control following the assassination.



Photo: Enif Karam

Facing up to fanaticism

Advocates of national unity between Egypt's Muslims and Copts have launched a fund-raising campaign to rebuild a Nile Delta village hit by sectarian strife

A group of Egyptian businessmen and Shura Council members, both Muslim and Christian, are raising funds for the reconstruction of the village of **Kafr Demian** in the Nile Delta province of **El-Shariya**, where 41 Coptic-owned houses were set on fire in an eruption of sectarian strife on 24 February, reports **Omayyeh Abdel-Latif**. Describing the incidents as "fanaticism that has nothing to do with Islam", the group said in a statement that "the rebuilding of this village will be a symbol of national unity and will mark a victory over sectarianism."

Riots broke out in the village after a false rumour circulated that the local church was to be enlarged. The rioters attempted to storm the church and the priest's house, before setting Christian homes on fire.

"The fund-raising campaign is not only for rebuilding the Coptic victims' homes, but also for reconstructing the entire village, which has fallen prey to sectarianism," explained **Moumir Fakhr Abdel-Nour**, a businessman and head of a national unity association.

"This is the first time that villagers have rioted because of a rumour that a church was being expanded. We had to do something to guarantee that similar incidents will not recur in other villages where Muslims and Christians have been living peacefully together."

The group sent a fact-finding mission to the village, which established that the rumour was groundless. The priest, it turned out, was not enlarging the church but merely reinforcing its ceiling.

A law dating back to the Ottoman period, and still in force today, stipulates that the construction of new churches or extensions to already-existing churches must have prior official authorisation.

Milad Hanna, a group member and housing expert, said that this law must be revised "if officials want to uproot the causes of sectarianism in the countryside."

In Hanna's view, the worst thing about these incidents "is that they differ from the violence in Upper Egypt, where both Copts and Muslims are targeted by militants to enslave the government."

Mamdouh Qenawi, a Shura Council member, said the group was planning to visit the stricken village to demonstrate support for the victims and for national unity.

Noting that the majority of the group's members were Muslim businessmen and intellectuals, Qenawi described their action as "a gesture showing that Muslims, more than anybody else, are condemning these incidents." He said the campaign was gaining momentum, with donations from businessmen and other members of the public being placed in a special bank account.

"Muslims have the primary responsibility of raising funds for the victims and meeting their basic needs until they can stand on their feet again," Qenawi, himself a Muslim, said.

A Coptic member of the group commented that the campaign would "shut the door in the face of some expatriate Coptic groups who exploit such incidents to embarrass the government."

In another development, a group of intellectuals, including lawyer **Ahmed Seif El-Islam**, television director **Imam Am Mohamed Ali**, **Makram Naguib** and **Hoda Zakariya**, have set up an "anti-sectarian strife committee" to address the causes of violence in both Kafr Demian and **Ezbet El-Qabet** in Assiut province, scene of another anti-Christian attack.

The group will seek meetings with the ministers of information and local administration as well as the governors of Assiut and El-Shariya to discuss future preventive measures. It will also take legal action on behalf of the victims.

Intellectuals set up liberties committee

Freedom of expression is a term that is hard to define. Government and civil society often find themselves in dispute over its definition, and over what constitutes the reasonable limits that should be placed on this freedom.

Upholding a liberal interpretation of the term, 110 intellectuals and professionals have decided to campaign for the release of hundreds of prisoners, described by the government as terrorists, but labelled as "prisoners of conscience" by human rights groups.

At a news conference at the Wafd Party offices last Saturday, the group announced the establishment of the National Committee for the Defence of Prisoners of Conscience.

The Interior Ministry maintains that there are no prisoners of conscience in Egypt. Interior Minister **Hassan El-Afi** has said that all those in police custody are being held pending investigation of their connection to terrorist groups.

The committee said one of its initial tasks would be to narrow the gap between the government's and its own definition of the problem. "We need to make an effort to establish a clear border-line between what constitutes violence and what constitutes freedom of expression, because the two seem to be overlapping in more than one area," said committee member **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed**, a left-wing political writer.

Outlining its platform, the committee said it would campaign for the release of those detained for political reasons under the emergency law, those serving court sentences for alleged political offences, and students and workers arrested for taking part in demonstrations. "But in no case are we going to defend or assist anyone facing charges of terrorism," stressed

A committee including representatives from across the political spectrum has been formed to defend imprisoned political activists, writes **Dina Ezzat**

the committee's secretary-general, **Mohamed Abdel-Qodous**, an Islamist journalist. According to Qodous an act of terrorism must involve the use of, or threat to use, firearms or other weapons.

Another task ahead of the committee is to make sure that those whom it views as prisoners of conscience are getting decent treatment while they remain behind bars. "Our ultimate goal is to have no prisoners of conscience in our country, but meanwhile we should ascertain that those now in jail are benefiting from the existing laws that promise them good treatment," said lawyer **Nabil El-Hilali**, another committee member.

The committee has representatives from across the political spectrum — right, left and centre. Among its members are **Kamal Abdul-Magid**, a renowned lawyer and former cabinet minister, **Isma'il Sabri Abdallah**, a former minister of planning and an economic analyst, and journalist **Salama Ahmed Salama** and **Farida El-Nagash**. "We may have our political disagreements but we are united in that each of us is entitled to freely express his views," explained committee member **Ibrahim El-Dessouki**, assistant secretary-general of the Wafd Party.

Members say that the committee's formation has come at a particularly crucial time, when security forces, embroiled in an ongoing confrontation with militant groups, might lose sight of a citizen's constitutional right to exercise freedom of expression, including public criticism of the government's policies and performance.

The committee said it was prepared to cooperate with the government and civil society in its effort to promote democracy. It will also organise workshops and publish literature highlighting the problem of prisoners of conscience.

Hijackers face death penalty

Three air pirates face charges punishable by death for hijacking an Egyptian airliner to Libya

Prosecution authorities have filed charges against three hijackers who forced the pilot of an Egyptian airliner on a domestic Luxor-to-Cairo flight to change course to Libya by spraying the floor of the cockpit with gunpowder. The three were remanded in custody for 15 days pending their trial.

They have been officially charged with hijacking a public means of transport, the possession and use of explosives inside a public means of transport and endangering the lives and property of citizens. Although the Middle East News Agency said the charges carry the death penalty, legal experts said capital punishment could not be used against two of the hijackers because they are minors.

The hijackers were named as **Mohamed Mahmoud Selim**, a 43-year-old restaurant owner, his son **Khaled Mohamed Mahmoud**, 17, and his cousin, **Ahmed Hussein Selim**, 14. The man who sold the gunpowder to the defendants, **Abdel-Wahab Mouskhar Abdel-Karim**, was also remanded in custody for 15 days.

The motives of the hijackers remain a mystery but, according to reports in the Arabic-language press, **Mohamed Selim** told interrogators that he masterminded the 27 March hijacking of the Airbus A-310 because he wanted to gain political asylum in Libya. He was also quoted as saying that he wanted to bring glory to his clan, raise high the head of President **Hosni Mubarak**, show opposi-

tion to Israel's blockade of the Palestinians and coovert a "message from God" to Libyan leader **Muammar Gaddafi**.

According to the same reports, the three said they plotted the hijacking without help from others and managed to smuggle the gunpowder through Luxor Airport's electronic detectors without assistance.

The restaurant owner said he took the decision to hijack the plane two weeks earlier. He concealed four plastic bags containing four kilograms of gunpowder inside two baskets filled with dates and herbs. He also ordered his son and cousin to conceal five wires inside their clothes, informing them that he was about to carry out a "major operation".

He bought three first-class tickets to make sure that they would sit in the front rows behind the cockpit. They managed to pass undiscovered through the metal detectors because, according to some reports, the gunpowder they carried does not trigger the detectors' alarm bells. At the airport's duty free shop, the second defendant was in-

structed by his father to buy three bottles of brandy.

Before boarding the plane they removed the gunpowder from the baskets and the five wires from their clothes, placing them inside a briefcase. Then they took their front row seats and waited.

The opportunity came when a stewardess went into the cockpit. The first two defendants followed her inside while the third remained behind to cover them.

The first defendant threatened to explode the plane unless the pilot, **Imhotep Nassar**, changed course to Libya. The pilot responded that he did not have enough fuel and suggested that he fly to Alexandria instead.

The hijackers insisted that he take the plane to Libya and, to show they meant business, sprayed the floor of the cockpit with gunpowder and the inflammable brandy. They also brandished a bottle with a fuse coming out of it. The pilot obeyed, flashed the hijack code signal, and flew the plane westward.

Before reaching Benghazi, with fuel running

short, the pilot spotted a military airport, **Martouba**, and asked Libyan authorities for permission to land there. His request was granted.

A high Libyan official, **Ahmed Qazzaf Al-Damm**, came to the airport and established radio contact with the hijackers. They demanded political asylum, which was approved, and then agreed to disembark.

The passengers also disembarked and were given a warm welcome by Libyan authorities, led by **Gaddafi** himself. **EgyptAir** sent another plane the following day to pick them up and bring them back to Cairo. Libyan authorities also promptly approved an Egyptian request for the extradition of the hijackers and they were put aboard the plane they had hijacked — which brought them to Cairo.

The two defendants who are minors told interrogators that they were informed of the first defendant's intention to hijack the plane only after they had taken their front row seats.

Prosecution authorities are also expected to question security officials at Luxor Airport to determine whether the hijacking was the result of a loophole in security precautions.

Reported by **Rana Allan**

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

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Getting serious about exports

By Adel A. Beshai

In the brief period that followed the formation of a new cabinet in Egypt, one gets the impression that there is seriousness of purpose in the economic sphere. Somehow, I cannot help but wonder why all the issues that are currently being discussed in the newspapers were virtually absent in the last nine years or so. It is as if the Egyptian economy was born only a few weeks ago. The problems are now being solved rather quickly. Anyhow, I shall refrain from discussing this broad question and concentrate on the issue at hand. I do so, with a view to offering some simple ideas aimed at the decision makers.

Whoever you are, whatever your ideology is and wherever you are, there can be no disagreement on the positive impact of exports on the growth of an economy. I recall here the mercantilists of the Middle Ages who considered exports to be the Moses and the Promised Land.

We have read in the newspapers lately that a Supreme Council for Exports will be established, headed by President Mubarak. This is a good step to take. However, I would like to point out that such a council will not be effective unless it grapples with the details of the problem confronting exporters and the conflicting interests of various institutions in the country.

If government employees at the airport insist on seeing samples of exported vegetables, and if the flight is delayed, then exports will be undermined no matter what decisions were taken at the highest levels of government.

An economist who writes about a theory of growth does well. Another who writes about a theory on the obstacles to growth does even better. My message, therefore, is: try to define the obstacles first.

The daily *Al-Ahram*, in its 5 March issue, outlined some useful suggestions made by the cabinet for encouraging exports. These included surmounting some obstacles in tariffs, transport, insurance, etc. Nevertheless, the mentality that exports are a residual of production still lingers. Indeed, the headline of that article in the paper sums up the prevailing attitude toward exports by adding the qualifier: "after ensuring that the local market is satisfied".

A change of mentality is sorely needed. In the same vein as we talk of industrialisation for export, why not talk of agriculture for export? Do we always have to export only the leftover potatoes, rice, onions, beans and garlic? This is what we do now. I'd venture to say that we need to move on at least two fronts.

A new approach is needed for traditional commodities, of which we only export the surplus. Take rice for example. Once upon a time, not in the distant past, Egypt was the biggest exporter of rice in the Near East region, exporting close to 1 million tons annually in the 1950's. Recently, however, this figure has dwindled to almost nothing. But recently, exports have started to pick up. Egyptian rice is the Japanese variety, which enjoys a good market demand. More can be done, especially as there are already several starch substitutes to rice available to the local consumer.

On another front, a move must be made for non-traditional exports, especially agricultural goods such as asparagus and snow peas. Egyptians, generally speaking, do not fancy these, and a good thing, too, since these two commodities enjoy a very high price on the international market. International demand for these products continues to grow and, in fact, some producers, who previously dominated international markets, are moving out of these commodities. Recent experiments in Egypt show that Egypt is quite adept at producing these non-traditional crops. Because they require few chemical fertilisers and do not need any pesticides, they fit exceptionally well in ranking even above the strictest standards imposed by Europe. American books of agronomy tell us that ancient Egypt was the home of asparagus, which can be grown on desert soil. The ancient Egyptians may have grown it for its medicinal uses, but it is used now as a luxury vegetable that can generate millions of dollars for Egypt.

Information and knowledge of the market are precisely what we need. Privatisation or no privatisation, if there is no market and if there is no knowledge of the market, all these become empty slogans. Asparagus and snow peas are only examples. There are many others such as medicinal plants and fresh flowers. For all these, again, it is knowledge of the markets that is the prime requisite.

A corollary of all this is international marketing. We may be good at producing a commodity, but we may not be so adept at international marketing. And when it comes to non-traditional exports, our knowledge is virtually non-existent. Apart from the usual problems of the ossified bureaucracy at the governmental level, the onus also falls on the private sector. Exchange rates constitute one aspect — a price aspect, but successful exports depend on quality, standardisation, packaging, time of deliveries, and so forth. There is a lot to be learned by the private sector in this regard. It is commendable that the country wants to do something about exports. But this can only be done if there is vision and long-term strategy wherein narrow interests will not militate against long-term national interests.

If the airline is in a monopolistic position and keeps raising the airfare for fresh vegetable transport, then this would vitiate the goal. Not dissimilar from this is the case of fertilisers. What happened recently in the distribution of that sector reduced the gains which began in 1986 when the Ministry of Agriculture liberalised most agricultural goods prices. The privatisation of fertiliser distribution, while fertiliser production was carried out by the public sector, created a new transition relationship between the producer and the distributor. The distributors were oligopolistically structured. At the same time, the government discovered belatedly that the law allowed exports. The results were not only a big jump in the price of fertilisers but also a failure to distribute to parts of Upper Egypt. In this situation, the agricultural bank, as a public monopoly with all its networks, was superior to the private quasi-monopoly situation. The lesson from this is that privatisation per se is not a panacea — market failures, missing markets, incomplete markets and the institutional legal structure cannot be ignored. The exercise is ultimately one of converting a potential comparative advantage into an actual one. Or, to use a more modern term, finding a competitive advantage. Let us remember two things here: First, a competitive advantage is to be created, not inherited. We need not continue to operate with the Mohamed Ali mentality of exporting raw cotton. And the creation of competitive advantage requires action on more than one front, as I have just clarified.

The challenge lies in the realisation of the fact that possible competitive advantages may be undermined by inappropriate policies in seemingly unrelated spheres. While every encouragement should be given to Egypt's booming small-scale industries, agro-industries, sound policies in banking practices for exports, one should not forget the new role for the government in a privatised economy. People talk of the government generating an enabling environment. But still the government has another role — steering, but not rowing, the boat. The government also should have the power of decreeing "thou shalt not" to avoid the disaster that happened recently when pesticides that were banned over 30 years ago were imported and were used to spray potatoes in storage. Thus, competitive advantage can be marred by government inaction in such situations. Next, we must realise that in talking about exports and trade, we will be facing a new international scene. In the past, the game was a binary game: North-South. In the 1970s, a new international economic order was established wherein the South explained to the North that it stood to lose from the prevailing international system. They demanded a system whereby they would not be simply suppliers of raw materials, suffering from instability. Developing countries may blame the advanced countries, but this does not absolve these Third World countries from the fact that they did not concentrate on priority issues such as market access, trading infrastructure of shipping, credit and distribution channels.

With the onset of the World Trade Organisation, developing countries, in a few years time, will have access to markets in advanced countries for things such as textiles. There will be new markets in the former centrally-planned economies. The game will change from being a binary game into a triad game: South-North-South.

The one aspect in this game which, I fear, has not yet received adequate attention is the South-South dimension. As market access in advanced countries improves, South-South competition to enter those markets will intensify and there will be winners and losers among Third World countries. The losers will cry loud.

The writer is professor of economics at the American University in Cairo.

As partnership negotiations between Egypt and the EU remain stalled over agricultural issues, a dispute is brewing over potato exports, writes Niveen Wahish

Egyptian potatoes in hot water

A French claim that Egyptian potatoes are infested with "brown rot" has exporters and farmers nervously awaiting a decision by the European Commission (EC) on whether the ban on the import of Egyptian potatoes will be lifted or sanctioned. Brown rot is a bacterial disease which infects potatoes but is not harmful to humans.

While Egyptian diplomats have succeeded in temporarily freezing a ban imposed by France on 22 March prohibiting the import of Egyptian potatoes, two shipments were turned away by France because of fear of the disease.

The decision to lift or endorse the ban hinges on the findings presented in a report to be filed by an EC delegation which was in Egypt for two days this week. The delegation was here to evaluate the system, adopted by Egyptian farmers and the government, to ensure that potato crops were clean and fit for consumption. During its stay, the delegation also investigated how the Egyptian agricultural quarantine authority checks crop exports before they are awarded the Phytosanitary

Certificate, which accompanies any exported agricultural foodstuffs.

The French ban, said David Appia, the economic and commercial counsellor at the French Embassy, has been temporarily lifted until the EC delegation files its report. The EC is expected to inform Egypt of its decision shortly after the delegation holds its meetings with European Commission officials in Europe. This visit is the second by an EC delegation in less than one year. The first was last September when Egyptian potato farmers met with an EC team who offered advice on certain agricultural techniques which the farmers subsequently adopted that season.

But while the first visit may have been amicable, the second visit, and the ban, have left many exporters and farmers irate. Othman El-Domiaty, chairman of El-Domiaty Group, stressed that the issue has been blown out of proportion and that France is just using brown rot as a pretext to close its markets to imported potatoes, fearing that local producers will lose money. Questioning why the French

suddenly became aware of the brown rot in Egyptian potatoes, he said, "Why the fuss. They could have simply turned the shipment of infected potatoes away."

The same question was on the lips of Samir El-Naggar, head of Daltex Company, a major agricultural exports firm. "What's the big deal about brown rot?" he asked. "Even European potatoes have been infected by it." For example, said El-Naggar, it was discovered in 1991 that Dutch potato seeds, exported to other European countries, were infected with brown rot. The ban, he said, was a drastic measure, especially considering that France did not abide by the agreement signed between Egypt and the EC's delegation last year. The agreement stipulates that plantation areas are to be divided into smaller lots, and coded in facilitate the tracing of infected shipments. It also provides that Egypt is required to publicise the areas infected and not export any crops grown in these areas.

Egyptian agricultural authorities, said El-Naggar, were zealous in their compliance with the agreement, but

despite their compliance, France took its decision without either consulting with, or warning Egypt. "It reached this decision in the middle of the season, after the investments had already been made; after producers had already made arrangements for the packaging, shipping and marketing of their crop," he asserted. "This step is disastrous not only for potato exporters and farmers, but for the whole Egyptian economy due to the number of people involved in the industry," stated El-Naggar.

The decision to impose the ban, he added, is primarily a political one. France wants to give its farmers a chance in market their stored crop, especially given that it is of inferior quality and does not stand a chance against Egyptian potatoes, he said.

El-Domiaty concurs. Fresh potatoes, he said, are in much greater demand by consumers and producers of processed potatoes than stored potatoes.

The French ban hits home hard due to the fact that the majority of Egypt's potato exports are bound for the EU. El-Domiaty said that Egypt exported about 450,000 tons to the

EU last year and is allowed a low-customs entry for its agricultural exports into the EU between January and March. During this period, 110,000 tons are completely customs-exempt. Amounts exceeding this figure are subject to a customs tax of 8 per cent until 31 March. But beginning 1 April, Egyptian agricultural exports to the EU are taxed at 13-14 per cent, and the tariff increases to 19 per cent during the peak season.

To sidestep these tariffs, Egyptian exporters are seeking to extend the period during which they are allowed entry into the EU, and to increase the quota, which is customs-exempt. El-Naggar said that the only chance that Egyptian potato exporters have is when EU potato production is low, or of bad quality. "Otherwise," he said, "we don't try to enter the market since the customs would raise the price of our crops on the market."

El-Domiaty noted that the ban will affect European seed exporters as well as Egyptian potato exporters and farmers. Egypt imports almost 90,000 mms of seeds per year from Europe.

Egypt-EU negotiations stall

NEGOTIATIONS between Egypt and the European Union (EU) on the liberalisation of Egyptian agricultural exports to the EU hit another obstacle early this week, with the EU failing to take a decisive stand on the issue.

Ambassador Gamal Bayoumi, head of the Egyptian delegation to the Egyptian-EU partnership agreement negotiations, returned to Egypt from the 6th round of negotiations, which concluded early this week, less than happy with the EU's reaction to the Egyptian position on exporting Egyptian agricultural products to the EU.

Bayoumi said that while the Egyptian side succeeded in clearly laying out its position, the EU's negotiator did not show any flexibility. Egypt, he said, is attempting to convince the EU that closing its doors to Egyptian agricultural exports will, in the long run, harm European agricultural exports to Egypt.

"We import five to six times more agricultural products from the EU than we export," stated Bayoumi, adding that about 80 per cent of the components of Egyptian agricultural exports to Europe are originally imported from the EU. For example, he said, while Egypt exported about 500,000 tons of potatoes to Europe in 1995, it imported about a 1.5 million tons of potato

seeds from the EU.

"In other words, a decline in Egyptian agricultural exports will meet with an equal decline in its imports," asserted Bayoumi. He added that the seasons during which Egypt was allowed to export to the EU, according to the 1977 cooperation agreement, are also unacceptable because they were drawn up on an unequal basis.

"For example, Egypt is allowed customs-exempt entry for its grape exports into Europe from January to May—a stretch of time when there is no grape crop in the first place," he said. Egypt, he added, does not intend to, and does not represent a threat to the EU's agricultural sector, by demanding a fair quota of the EU's agricultural market.

Bayoumi said that if the EU is not able to expand its free trade area to include agricultural goods, "the least it can do is to guarantee access of Egyptian agricultural goods in any way that is agreed upon by both sides." Egypt, he said, will not insist on specifying certain quantities if the EU will agree to draw up a list of the exchanged goods to be fully liberalised.

He said that the very least Egypt will accept is that the balance of trade in the agricultural sector between the two parties is

adjusted. "Egypt will not continue to be just an importer, and it will not allow the EU to go on endlessly exporting to the Egyptian market twice the amount that it imports," Bayoumi warned.

While negotiations on agricultural goods were less-than-conclusive, talks on the liberalisation of the industrial sector continued without a hitch. Both sides agreed to adopt a programme for the modernisation and renovation of Egypt's industrial sector to enable it to compete internationally.

Bayoumi said that both sides also agreed to the framework of the financial cooperation that will address Egypt's economic and social development. They also agreed, in principle, to a link between the modernisation of the industrial sector and any cuts in customs tariffs on EU industrial exports.

Bayoumi also said that with the conclusion of this round of talks, the two sides have almost completed their negotiations. The only issues still to be resolved are agricultural exports, which will be addressed by the EU, and intellectual property rights which will be tackled by the Egyptian side.

"The agreement can be ready in weeks if the EU would take a decision on the liberalisation of agricultural imports," he stated.

Laying off the beef

While distributors of frozen meat were hard hit by the mad cow disease scare, owners of fast food outlets still seem to be raking in the cash

Sherif Mahmoud, a 32-year-old engineer, was, until last week, a meat-lover. However, since panic broke out over the mad cow disease, he has turned semi-vegetarian. "Even while ordering a pizza, I only take chicken, shrimp or vegetarian toppings," Mahmoud said.

Word of the disease has spread like wild-fire, prompting many consumers to boycott meat products, fearing that they may be contaminated. However, this does not seem to have affected sales in fast food chains.

Mahmoud Kaisoun, vice chairman of the Egyptian Company for International Touristic Projects (Americana), a major company which owns and manages a number of fast food franchises in Egypt, said that their sales have not been affected at all as a result of the meat scare. He attributed this mainly to the fact that their different outlets offer a variety of meals that do not necessarily involve using beef. "This provides an alternative to health-conscious mothers," he said, assuring his customers that for the recipes that require meat, his company uses either local meat or that which is imported from the United States and Australia, not from Britain or Europe. "For our hamburgers, we use locally-produced meat only," he said.

Monitoring consumer orders, an employee at a popular chain of pizza restaurants, who refused to give his name, said that his customers did not hesitate to order any item with meat because, according to him, "individuals frequenting fast-food chains trust the name of the outlet they are buying from."

But while fast food outlets may still be doing brisk business, the same cannot be said of processed meat products. Although some processed meat factories advertise that they do not use imported meat and others declared that they do not import from either Britain or Europe, consumers have decided not to take the risk.

Nahed Ahmed, an employee in the Ministry of Agriculture, said that 10 days ago she used to frequently purchase the processed minced meat sold at the supermarket, but will now begin to buy the meat fresh from the butcher instead of frozen from the supermarket.

Donya, the owner of a supermarket in Helwan, said that demand for processed meat products has fallen badly. "I only get one or two customers a day requesting frozen minced meat," he said. "A week ago I depended on the sales of processed minced meat, even more than frozen hamburgers and hot dogs."

In the meantime, while the ban on British beef continues, the Ministry of Supply and Trade, Ahmed Guehli, in coordination with the General Ports Authority, this week permitted the entry of three shipments of livestock and frozen meat which reached Egyptian ports before the ban went into effect on 23 March. These shipments were subject to strict inspection upon their entry into Egyptian ports.

Hussein Mohamed Hussein, head of the Food Imports Department at the General Authority for Imports and Exports Control, said, "Last Friday, the Ministry of Trade and Supply allowed the entry of any other meat shipments which reached Egyptian ports seven days after the ban. The fixed deadline for allowing shipments of livestock and beef into the country was 29 March."

Abdel-Rahman Fawzi, head of the Foreign Trade Policies Department in the Ministry of Trade and Supply, said that such measures are usually implemented to prevent the negative results of a ban on goods.

The ban, he said, "will not affect our relationship with the European Union since it was the EU itself that imposed the ban on British beef."

Reported by Mona El-Fiqi, Niveen Wahish and Shereen Abdel-Razek

Wheat watch

RUMOURS of a fungus-ridden strain of US wheat had Egyptian consumers worried. But both Egyptian and US officials denied the allegations. Mariz Tadros reports

Following last week's mad cow disease scare, rumours have emerged that Egypt's wheat imports from the United States may be affected by a wheat disease known as "Karnal Bunt". With Egypt being the number one importer of American wheat and the third largest wheat importer in the world after China and the Russian Federation, these allegations truly struck home among consumers. Karnal Bunt, a fungal disease spread by spores carried by plant parts, equipment, tools and through the soil, affects the yield and quality of the wheat, but has no health repercussions on humans or livestock.

Responding to the rumours, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture Youssef Wali denied the allegations of a threat to consumers, insisting that all wheat imports undergo rigorous inspections before being sold on the market.

Adel Kamel, head of the American Department at the trade representative's office in the Ministry of Supply and Trade, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that durum, the type of wheat infected by the Karnal Bunt, he said, is not imported from the United States at all.

Some 21 countries, including Egypt, have banned the entry of American durum wheat. Egypt's imports of US wheat, however, will not be affected by the current crisis, Kamel said, and an increase in wheat imports from other wheat exporters such as the EU and Australia is not likely to occur.

According to the American Wheat Council, Karnal Bunt has been detected in southwestern Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. While not dangerous to the consumer, if the level of Karnal Bunt in the wheat exceeds three per cent, it is unfit for use because of its effect on the colour, odour and flavour of the wheat.

Hassan Ahmed, the agricultural attaché at the American Embassy in Cairo, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that all wheat exports from the US go through strict control measures. He added that "all this hype in the media about the Egyptian consumer being presented with contaminated wheat is simply not true. This hysteria has come on the heels of the mad cow disease."

Edited by Ghada Ragab

World Bank 'impressed'

WORLD Bank President James Wolfensohn said last week that the World Bank (WB) is ready to be of any financial assistance to Egypt in its efforts to continue implementing its economic reform programme.

Speaking to reporters at the end of a visit to Cairo last week, Wolfensohn said, "We are very impressed by the government's approach to expansion in the economy, facing the need to create new jobs, the needs of the social sector and moving the economy forward."

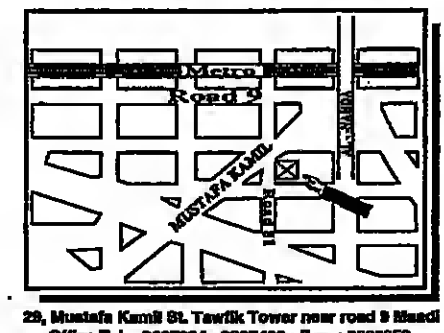
He said that in his opinion, the investment climate in Egypt is a favourable one. "If I were in the private sector, I would come here to invest," stated Wolfensohn.

The World Bank, he added, is also ready to participate in the Egyptian privatisation programme by buying into the industrial public sector through its investment arm, the International Finance Corporation.

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The price of America's demons

By Asef Bayat

The Sharm El-Sheikh summit marks the beginning of a new round of the US-Israeli campaign against the Islamic Republic of Iran. The US accuses Iran of slowing down the peace process in the Middle East by supporting the Hamas movement; it claims that Iran is responsible for a number of terrorist attacks in Europe, and it alleges that, by developing nuclear bombs, Iran is threatening the stability of the region. Not only has the US continued its official economic embargo against Iran since the early 1980s, it has intensified its campaign to get the European community to exert pressure on the Islamic Republic. The aim seems to be to undermine the Islamic regime in Tehran and coerce it into complying with the West.

Undoubtedly, the Iranian government's record on human rights, political pluralism, and ways of dealing with the international community leaves much to be desired. At the same time, however, people of the region find it hard to digest US double standards when it comes to the human rights abuses of its allies in the Persian Gulf, not to mention its flagrant hypocrisy regarding the Israeli nuclear build-up and the latter's suppression of the Palestinian people. In the US's view, only Israel should be allowed to have a nuclear arsenal in the region. Iran has signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, while Israel has refused.

But this is not the main point. My point here is that the US's political threats and the economic pressures it is exerting on Iran are unlikely to achieve their objective of undermining the Islamic government. A more likely scenario is that this will lead to a conservative backlash within both government and society; this backlash will undermine the more liberal changes that are underway in that society. The ultimate victims of the US-Israeli campaign, therefore, will be the Iranian people — not the government.

The US administration advisors have not yet understood the basic socio-historical disposition of people in the region to rally behind unpopular governments to safeguard their national dignity when threatened by an outside force. The post-revolutionary events in Iran and the two Gulf wars are a testament to this. As such, it is wishful thinking for Western countries to suppose that their embargoes will make the Iranian government unpopular, more often than not, economic pressure facilitates governments to put the blame for their internal shortcomings on the foreign powers which implement embargoes. The result is that the people end up paying the price. It is by now abundantly clear that Saddam Hussein is not the victim of the embargo against Iraq; the people, particularly the poor, are. Numerous reports from Iraq suggest that it is, by and large, the low-income Iraqis who bear the burden of Saddam Hussein's "punishment" at the hands of the West. And, not surprisingly, Saddam Hussein has succeeded in passing the responsibility back to his enemies.

Eyewitness accounts from streets in Tehran suggest that, while most people are frustrated with high prices and inflation, they partially blame the US for the worsening situation. Last summer there were widespread rumours that the US government was encouraging tourists from the new central Asian states to purchase huge amounts of Iranian foodstuffs in order to create shortages. This was at a time when, according to the governor of Khorasan province, central Asians, mainly traders, were purchasing \$500,000 worth of goods per day from the eastern city of Mashhad alone.

Fears of disorder and losing control caused by external pressure place governments in a position where, in an "emergency situation", they tend to exert more control over their own people — limit intellectual life, curtail criticism, and undermine popular participation. In the mid-'80s, the Reagan administration, aware of this general rule, put heavy economic and military pressure on the Sandinista government, forcing it to declare a "state of emergency" in the country, then announced to the world that "there is no democracy in Nicaragua". Such a tendency can slow down the significant, if gradual, changes taking place today in Iran.

Perhaps because of the exclusion of many political groups from participation in electoral politics, people have thrown all their efforts into civil activism, generating a vibrant civil society. In the last few years, numerous NGOs concerned with women, youth, environment, welfare and especially culture have emerged. There is an unprecedented upsurge in artistic activities among lay Iranians. Western and indigenous classical music have acquired record popularity amongst young people. This represents a major departure from the situation as it was a decade ago, when music was considered by authorities to be "the opium of the masses". Numerous impressive cultural centres, set up by the innovative mayor of Tehran, Gholam Hussein Karubi (followed by others), have boosted this secularisation of leisure.

Undoubtedly, the direction taken by the younger generation, the children of the revolution, is a major preoccupation of the authorities. Large segments of the population, especially young women, have resisted indoctrination and pursue secular life styles. At the same time, the future does not look very bright for many of them; they do not feel that their education will bring them the expected rewards. The sluggish economy turns their expectations into outrage. In Iran today, the question is: which ideological inclinations will these youngsters pursue? In this new post-Islamist phase, young people in Iran are in an ideological void, in conditions where they feel they have experienced many political ideologies but have not gained much. Secular authenticity — in the form of art, music and modern science — is what some enlightened leaders are offering them.

The problem of young people is only one of the many issues which are debated widely in public. Indeed, intellectual life, publications, seminars, and literary evenings have never been so brisk, lively and open since the democratic years of 1946-1953 which ended when a CIA-led coup toppled the secular nationalist government of Mossadegh. Today, over 600 intellectual weeklies, monthlies, and bimonthlies are published, some 400 of them in Tehran alone. Diverse issues, including economic mismanagement, intellectual freedoms, human rights, women, poverty, population control, religion, secularism, *hijab*, globalisation and postmodernism, are discussed. One of the most widely debated issues is the separation of religion from the state, a subject deemed taboo only a few years ago. This debate has been initiated by Abdul-Karim Soroush, an articulate professor of philosophy, a former ideologue of the Islamic state and a Ph.D. from London University. Soroush is well-versed both in Western science and philosophy and in Islam,

especially jurisprudence, and more sophisticated in this field than Ali Shariati; his ideas have gathered great momentum, galvanising a movement known as *andishe-ye digar*, or Alternative Thought.

Alternative Thought is neither anti-Islamic nor secular, but seeks to redefine the capabilities of religion in this modern age to address complex human needs. Epistemologically, it calls for a hermeneutic reading of Qur'an, rejecting a single "true reading", and, for that matter, "expert reading" exclusively by the *ulama*. In fact, it seeks to end the professionalisation of religious interpretation by the clergy, who subsist on religion. Informed by enlightenment thought, the movement serves as an implicit critique of the idea of *wilayat-i faghih*, the rule of the supreme jurist, which is the basis of the Islamic state in Iran today. It argues that the management of modern societies is both possible and desirable, not through religion, but through scientific rationality in a democratic structure. Soroush not only believes that Islam and democracy are compatible, but also that their association is inevitable. What emerges from this thought is a call for the establishment of a secular democratic state which accommodates Islam as a faith. Religious faith, he argues, must be encouraged to cope with the harsh realities of life and can provide the mechanisms of individual control against the abuse of others.

The Alternative Thought movement has gathered a great deal of support among young, educated, urban, both religious-minded and secular Iranians, especially the modern middle classes. But perhaps more importantly, Soroush has gained a significant following among the theology students, more so than among the senior clergy. Support for his ideas among members of the *ulama* stems from a realisation that at the end of the day they are better off if they leave dirty politics to politicians. The fusion of religion and the state is seen to have not only polluted the sanctity of Islam as a calling, it has also made the clergy dependent upon the state. Beyond that, it has tarnished the spiritual and social legitimacy of the clergy, as many Iranian Muslims tend to equate the failures of the state with that of the *ulama*.

The recent parliamentary elections, in some ways, manifest these changes at a broader level. The technocratic trend, associated with the "servants of construction", seems to have gained grounds. This trend represents a high-level decision-making body that seeks rational, practical solutions to the country's problems, even though they may have to compromise religion. Since the first Majlis, as Gary Sick reports, the number of clergy has dropped from over 50 per cent of the deputies to less than 25 per cent. The number of women participants has increased, and over 75 per cent of deputies are new faces, largely with higher, secular education. In short, the composition of the parliament has steadily been changing: from socially conservative, ideologically committed, less educated, and revolutionary veterans to a more technocratic, independent, new delegates with secular higher education.

An Islamic feminist movement has also emerged within the framework of Alternative Thought. The activists, familiar with both western feminist debates and Qur'anic teachings, are fighting within the Islamic discourse to revoke those anti-women laws and practices that are said to have religious justifications. "Equality of Men and Women in Islam": relying on this slogan, accepted by clerical leaders, the movement has made considerable inroads, empowering women in the domain of employment, education and family law. The portrait of Iranian women in the West as oppressed in the solitude of domesticity and hidden under the long black *chador* is no more than a crude over-simplification. Despite heavy pressure, Iranian women are active in social, scientific, and cultural fields perhaps more than at any other time in their history. Half the positions in the government sector and over 40 per cent of education jobs are filled by women. Of course, women are forcibly veiled. But, for some, veiling has facilitated their mobility within male-dominated fields. Thus, many lower-class women who previously remained at home are now mobilised and playing a social role in neighbourhood and religious institutions. Nevertheless, those modern middle-class women who suffer from forced veiling have not remained silent. Officials have invariably complained about "bad-hijabi", the laxity of young girls in observing veiling in public — referring to women's resistance against this imposition.

In addition, the opportunity of equal education with men has made a come-back following the official restrictive quotas which favoured men. Polygamy has been seriously curtailed, men's right to divorce restricted, and religiously-sanctioned *nika* marriage (within which an informal contract is signed for a specified period of time) demystified. Child custody, which in Islam favours the father (after the child has reached a certain age), is also being debated, and the struggle for women to be judges is now on the agenda. Women activists are organised in some 60 NGOs; they communicate their ideas through such publications as *Zaman*, *Parzaneh* and *Zan-e Rouz*, organise rallies, participate in international conferences, lobby politicians and clerical leaders, and campaign in the Majlis. Iranian women today see themselves as being at the forefront of the struggle for the empowerment of women in the Muslim world.

Of course, much more needs to be done in social, political and cultural life to produce a decent democratic and participatory climate. Many of those who situate themselves beyond the dominant discourse are still forbidden from organising political parties and excluded from parliament; some 40 per cent of the nominees for the recent elections were excluded. Yet what I have described above indicates significant developments. Not only do these developments create political space for expression and participation, if continued, they may entail significant political changes in favour of the Iranian people.

At this crucial juncture, a serious threat by the US or any other power against Iran will only revive the more conservative tendencies within state and society, disrupting this gradual change and bringing things back to square one. Dialogue, not harassment or isolation, should be the way through which to deal with the Islamic Republic at this time. The Iranians, even the "Westernised" classes, are still wary about US intentions in Iran and in the region. Iran today is not Haiti under the generals. The European Community's dialogue with Iran bears better results than the antagonistic policy of the USA.

The author is associate professor of sociology at the American University in Cairo.



A Palestinian schoolgirl protesting against the ongoing closure outside of Hebron last Tuesday (photo: Reuters)

Israel's unilateral peace

Israel's drastic response to Hamas' suicide bombings have more or less brought the peace process to a halt. But is Israel merely avenging its dead, or is it using the situation in an attempt to pursue a unilateral peace process, asks **Graham Usher**

"It is clear that Israel has unilaterally suspended the peace process," according to former PLO spokesman and newly-elected Palestinian council member for Jerusalem, Hanan Ashrawi. In its stead, she puts it, "we have an electoral process subordinated to the issue of Israel's personal security".

In the wake of Islamist-inspired suicide attacks that left 58 Israelis dead in nine days, Israel instituted two measures, one security based and the other political. First, it imposed a total blockade of the Occupied Territories that has now lasted five weeks, causing economic conditions of absolute impoverishment. In Gaza, the UN estimates a current unemployment rate of 70 per cent and a "dangerous" drop in cash liquidity, so that even where food and goods are available, most Palestinians no longer have the savings to buy them.

The second measure — less publicised, but in the long run equally deadly to the peace process — is the (Israeli) unilateralism that Ashrawi refers to.

On 25 February — the day two Hamas suicide bombers killed 25 Israelis in attacks in Jerusalem and Ashkelon — Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, "temporarily froze all contacts" with Yasser Arafat's Palestinian National Authority (PNA). The move caused Palestinian resentment, but little alarm, with the PNA viewing it as a minor sanction to assuage Israeli public outrage. Nearly six weeks on, however, the freeze is still in place, with Arafat and the Palestinians becoming genuinely scared about what it portends.

"There have been no Israeli-PNA meetings [since the bombings] at any level other than that of security," says the PNA's Deputy Economics Minister Samir Huleihel. And the security liaison "consists of Israeli army generals telling our police what they expect them to do".

Other than a low-key meeting with two Israeli ministers on 20 March, Arafat's only substantive meeting with Israel during the crisis caused by the attacks was

on 27 February, with the Israeli Defence Force's chief of staff, Amnon Shahak. Shahak told Arafat then that there would be no further progress in the peace process unless Arafat took action against Hamas' "terrorist infrastructure in the self-rule areas", and arrested 13 Islamist fugitives wanted by Israel. In the weeks following, PNA security forces in the territories took over around 59 "suspect" mosques in Gaza, raided 30 Islamist-affiliated institutions and arrested upwards of 900 Palestinians, including seven on Shahak's list. To no avail. Last week, Peres said that while these actions show Arafat is "getting serious" against Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the PLO leader is still "not doing enough".

Dictates like these — made as government statements or via media interviews — appear to be Peres' preferred mode of communication these days with his Palestinian "partner" in the peace process. It is easy to see why, for they allow the Israeli prime minister not only to determine the pace of the peace process, but also its preconditions.

On 28 March, Peres said that Israel was postponing its partial redeployment from the West Bank town of Hebron. The withdrawal, due on that day according to the PLO-Israel "interim agreement" signed last September, would not be made until the PNA arrested the fugitives and the PLO amended the clauses in the Palestinian Covenant which deny Israel's right to exist. Neither of these conditions appear in the text of the September agreement. On 1 April, the Peres added another condition. Any final peace settlement with the Palestinians would be subject to an Israeli referendum, he said. "This cannot be described as a violation of the agreement, but its amendment" was the weary response of PNA Justice Minister Fathi Abd Midan.

Such bravado certainly enhances Peres' electoral prospects, since demeaning Arafat goes down well on the Israeli street. But other Israeli decisions taken in the aftermath of the suicide attacks are far more ominous, impinging on both the shape and content of any

future Palestinian polity.

In March, the Israeli Interior Ministry confirmed to Israeli lawyers that it had instructions to cancel the residency status of all Palestinians in Jerusalem whose "centre of life" is no longer in the city; that is those Palestinians who are from occupied or Arab East Jerusalem but who currently live abroad or elsewhere in the Occupied Territories. The measure is not only against "all international norms and agreements", according to lawyer Lea Tsemel. It also "contradicts Israeli law", which states that "permanent residents of Israel" (i.e. the 160,000 Palestinians of annexed East Jerusalem) only forfeit their right to residency if they live abroad for seven years or more. But the aim of measure is clear. It denies "absent" Palestinians their right of abode in Jerusalem and panics "present" Palestinians into taking Israeli citizenship for fear of losing their residency rights in Jerusalem, as hopes that the city will ever be the capital of a Palestinian state diminish.

Equally alarmingly, the suicide attacks have expedited a series of Israeli military orders confiscating Palestinian land for the ongoing construction of 26 new "by-pass roads" in the Occupied Territories. These roads have already taken 21 square kilometres of West Bank and Gaza turf and, added together, are nearly 220 kilometres in length. Their aim, says Palestinian geographer and former PNA negotiator, Khalil Tafaj, is not simply to service the 130 Jewish settlements that exist (illegally) in the West Bank and Gaza. The roads effectively "surround and control the main Palestinian self-rule areas so that they can be militarily divided one from the other," he says.

Are these tactical measures, brought in to avenge the loss of so many Israelis at the hands of the suicide bombers? Or are they strategic decisions by Israel to ensure that the territories remain as enclaves governed by a "functional" Palestinian authority, rather than a sovereign Palestinian state. No Palestinian can tell you, including Arafat and members of the PNA.

Battle over the Sharm agenda

The plight of Palestinians under siege stole the show at the follow-up meeting to the Sharm El-Sheikh Peacemakers Summit. **Hoda Tawfik** writes from Washington

The stage was set for yet another round of condemnation of terrorism and extremist elements in the Middle East. But Arab and Palestinian delegates at the follow-up meeting to the Sharm El-Sheikh summit, held in Washington on 28-29 March, dealt a coup de grace to the Israeli-proposed agenda. The original plan spearheaded by the United States and Israel aimed to focus on means of enhancing Israeli security.

From an Arab standpoint, the Washington meeting achieved one tangible result, and that was the agreement to ease Palestinian economic hardship in the wake of a one-month Israeli closure of the self-rule areas of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Diplomats from 29 nations of the Middle East, Europe and America agreed at the end of the meeting to hold a foreign ministers meeting in Luxembourg on 12 April to see how international donors can best extend additional financial assistance in the Palestinian autonomous areas.

Ambassador Ahmed Maher El-Sayed, head of the Egyptian delegation to the Washington meeting, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he had mentioned in a preparatory meeting that the original agenda did not reflect the Sharm El-Sheikh summit communiqué. "We heard the word terrorism repeated 20 times, but references to peace and other dangers to peace only a few times," he said.

"We succeeded in coordinating with the Europeans, led by France, and other Arab nations to shift the emphasis to Israel's closure of the West Bank and Gaza, in its destruction of the homes of suspected terrorists and their families. By insisting on addressing these issues, and not just methods of combating suicide bombers, we managed to put the meeting on the right track and end with a balanced conference," El-Sayed explained.

When US Secretary of State Warren Christopher opened the Washington meeting, he announced that Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres had agreed to take steps to ease the closure by allowing more goods to enter the PNA-controlled territories. Israel will also look into a job creation programme to which it, together with other donor countries, will contribute. But it is uncertain how effective these symbolic measures will be in alleviating the extreme economic hardship in the self-rule areas.

Saeed Erekat, head of the Palestinian delegation, told the meeting that, by imposing the blockade, "Israel waged war against elected President Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian people." The Palestinian economy is now losing \$42 million per month. "In his concluding remarks,

he appealed to the gathering to put pressure on Israel to lift the siege.

The meeting's formal sessions were not devoid of their share of dramatic revelations. Delegates heard from Ambassador Itamar Rabinovich, head of the Israeli delegation, that by a stroke of luck his wife's life was saved because she just managed to miss the bus destroyed by a suicide bomber in Tel Aviv.

Diplomats and experts also discussed issues such as extraditing suspects and ensuring that "terrorists" did not take advantage of countries that offered asylum. They looked at means of controlling the funds of organisations suspected of having links with suicide bombers and imposing tougher border controls to curb the use of forged travel documents.

European delegates, who spoke on condition of anonymity, expressed their relief that the US backed down and broadened the agenda to focus on peace and Israeli security measures against the Palestinians. A senior French delegate said that the closure of the self-rule areas was counterproductive and would only fuel extremism.

At the end of the day, it is the outcome of the Luxembourg meeting that will determine the consequences of decisions reached at the Washington meeting. Ambassador El-Sayed told the *Weekly* that the report currently being prepared by the US State Department must reflect the various points of view expressed by the participants during the two-day discussions. All countries that went to Washington must agree on the report before the US refers it to the Luxembourg meeting later this month. El-Sayed said that Egypt welcomes the measures announced by Warren Christopher, but that these remain emergency measures only.

El-Sayed said that Egypt's position was clear and could be summed up in three points. Egypt would like to see an end to the collective punishment imposed on Palestinians, the resumption of peace negotiations and respect for the Oslo agreements, including Israeli withdrawal from Hebron. This approach was supported by France, Saudi Arabia and other Arab participants.

"We are going to pursue the road to peace, security and prosperity. This is how we will remain faithful to the real philosophy behind the Sharm El-Sheikh summit," El-Sayed explained.

"We did not reach concrete results," he said, however. "We talked and they talked, but no measures were adopted. Perhaps the only positive result is that we succeeded in reversing the Israeli approach, which was to impose on us its own agenda of fighting terrorism. Terrorism is everywhere and combating terrorism should be addressed in a global conference and not here."

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WITHIN ONE WEEK.

Upping the ante in Bahrain

Continued political unrest in Bahrain has fuelled fears of outside intervention and the imposition of martial law, reports Khaled Dawoud

Fresh clashes broke out in Bahrain this week as word spread of the firing squad execution on 26 March of a political dissident convicted of killing a policeman in riots last year. This was the first execution in Bahrain in 20 years. Opposition groups called the death of Issa Qambar, 29, "political murder" and warned of increased violence.

But the Bahraini government, wracked by 15 months of mounting political unrest in this key Gulf financial centre and home to a major US naval base, said the execution came after the convicted man had exhausted all legal appeals. An official spokesman said the government was determined to halt what he described as "terrorist acts" financed from outside, an apparent reference to Iran.

Amnesty International expressed dismay at the execution, saying it followed "a trial which ignored internationally accepted human rights standards". It called on Bahrain's emir, Sheikh Issa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa, to prevent further executions.

Amnesty and the Bahraini opposition fear that more dissidents may stand on death row after Sheikh Al-Khalifa issued a decree earlier this month forming a special State Security Court to try suspects of political violence swiftly without allowing them recourse to appeal.

The newly established court last Wednesday handed out its first verdict, sentencing three men to prison terms of five years. More suspected saboteurs, allegedly involved in a se-

ries of recent violent incidents, are expected to stand trial before the special court soon.

The worst incident of violence recently was the killing on 14 March of seven Bangladeshis in the fire-bombing of a restaurant. Seven people were arrested in connection with the attack, which shocked residents of Bahrain. Since then, the bombing of hotels, restaurants and government installations and the burning of cars have become almost daily events.

The government's tough stand against the opposition got a boost this week when Saudi Arabian Defence Minister Sultan Bin Abdel-Aziz pledged full support for efforts to end the worst internal strife in an Arab Gulf country in nearly two decades.

Abdel-Aziz said last week that his country "is ready to stand by Bahrain with all its strength if need be". He said he agreed with the Bahraini government that acts of violence were supported from outside and that they were not a result of internal opposition.

Moreover, Jordanian Prime Minister Abdel-Karim Al-Kabarti has given assurances of his country's backing of the Bahraini government and its readiness to provide it with "all forms of political, moral and material support". Kabarti's statement came one day after reports that the Bahraini government was considering calling in Jordanian army troops for assistance.

If the security situation continues to deteriorate, it appears that Bahrain would prefer to use Arab troops to restore order rather than depend on

American or European troops. Deploying Western forces would be a politically explosive move in the region.

The Bahraini opposition-in-exile denied they have chosen to escalate the confrontation against the government. They said that the government's intransigence, particularly after the latest execution, was the real reason behind the acts of violence carried out by angry young Bahrainis.

"The call for democratic reforms will be strengthened," the London-based opposition Bahraini Freedom Movement said in a statement issued after the execution. "The murder of Issa Qambar is bound to fuel more unrest despite all the measures of collective punishment. Bahrain now faces a bleak future," the statement added.

The Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, a more radical opposition group, threatened in another statement to escalate the violence.

The spokesman for Bahrain's Freedom Movement, Mansour Al-Jamri, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in a telephone interview that his group, the largest of Bahrain's few opposition groups, strongly deplored the killing of the seven Bangladeshis. He called for prayers for the victims in all mosques.

He said the government, by continuing its crackdown on opponents and refusing to listen or to consider opposition demands, was the one to blame for the increased violence.

"Since December 1994, we have been peacefully calling for the res-

toration of parliament and democracy in Bahrain," Jamri said. "But the government responded by arresting thousands of people, and the issue since then has become the release of those prisoners."

Jamri reiterated his rejection of the government's claims that the attacks were backed by Iran just because the riots were concentrated in Shi'ite residential areas. "We have no relations with Iran whatsoever. Our demands are domestic and the government knows that very well. But claiming that we are Iranian agents is the only way the government can get the backing of Saudi Arabia and the United States," he said.

Jamri did not exclude the possibility of the government declaring martial law, allowing the army to take control of the situation. "That would be the first step towards deploying Saudi, Jordanian or any foreign troops to suppress the opposition movement in Bahrain," he said.

Fears over the possible imposition of martial law in Bahrain came after the government-backed newspapers called for harsh measures to suppress the opposition. The English-language newspaper *The Gulf News* called on authorities to "use every drastic measure at their disposal, showing no mercy, regardless of what the Western media or anyone will say. Whether it be through martial law or more rigorous policing, these monsters must be swiftly brought to justice."

Waiting to inhale

By Mohamed Beshir Hamid

While the world is being distracted at one moment by peace-mongering in the Gulf of Aqaba and, at the other, by war-mongering in the Straits of Taiwan, the military Islamist government of Sudan has been relentlessly pioneering election-mongering in what may well turn out to be the most significant breakthrough in democratisation processes since the idea of "one man, one vote" was first conceived. The fact that this historic event has largely been ignored by the international media only serves to confirm my suspicions of a worldwide conspiracy to subvert and undermine the "Islamic civilisational project" currently underway in Sudan. But that's another story. The basic concept behind this unique experiment is simple to the point of absurdity — which, no doubt, explains why no one but the resourceful leaders of the ruling National (really International) Islamic Front (NIF) can come up with it.

The process involves making the rationing of everything from sugar to salt an inescapable fact of daily life. The principle is known in NIF ideology as "abundance in scarcity" or, alternatively, "the equitable distribution of distress". But that's another story. Once the government is certain beyond any reasonable doubt that everyone is on its rationing lists, the names are automatically transferred to what is known in the trade as voter registration lists. The government then announces the holding of both presidential and parliamentary elections.

The ingenuity of the NIF's democratic innovations goes beyond the usual electoral practice of simply stuffing the names on the voter registration lists into the ballot boxes of the government's official candidates. Other individuals, whose main qualification is the absolute inability to oppose, are invited or induced to run as opposition candidates. The only snag is that once they declare their candidacy, these candidates are not allowed to withdraw from the race, even when it finally dawns on some of them that their chances of winning are on the same par as balancing the US budget. With the

possible exception of Pat Buchanan, no other regime seems to subscribe to this democratic notion of non-withdrawal. But that's another story.

After the voting is over — with or without the involuntary participation of the electorate — the election results are not immediately announced. The democratic rationale behind this is to allow for a mandatory period of electoral suspense. Indeed, speculations of election upsets are officially encouraged. Thus, the former internationally unknown swimming champion running against the president can be forgiven for momentarily taking his mind off the campaign to make mental measurements of the presidential swimming pool. When the results are finally and dramatically announced, they are not the avalanche of 99,999 per cent usually inflicted on some run-of-the-mill banana republic. Nor are they the puny 50 per cent often considered for some mysterious reason as a landslide in the so-called democracies in the West. Instead, the winning margin is a neat and solid 75 per cent — a real testimony to the ideals of democratic modesty and electoral self-sufficiency.

Mind you, the NIF leaders will be the first to admit that their considerable democratic achievements are still far from perfect — and we are not merely concerned here over the fate of the missing 25 per cent of the vote. The problem is the notorious lack of conformity among the Sudanese people, many of whom have somehow managed to avoid participation in the electoral process by surviving outside the rationing system altogether. But we can all rest assured that such reprehensible acts of voter apathy will not be allowed to endure for long. Come the next election and a new system for air rationing will certainly be in place. Any Sudanese claiming to have exhaled when he was supposed to inhale will then be unceremoniously deported to the US to join company with President Clinton. But that's another story.

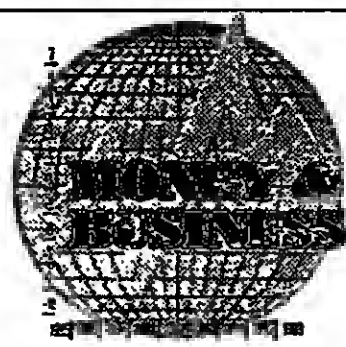
The writer is a Sudanese political scientist and former minister of culture and information, now resident in the US.

Shrinking reserves send copper prices high

DECREASING copper reserves sent copper prices at unprecedented increase in last month. Analysts point out that the copper reserves have been critically depleted, forcing a price increase which has reached \$2835 per ton.

The jump in copper prices came after the market was swamped with demands for copper, in the wake of rumours of further price hikes due to the constantly shrinking reserves.

MONEY & BUSINESS



33 Companies gain approval

THE COMPANIES' Committee at the Ministry of Economy headed by Ahmed Fouad Atta, first undersecretary in the Ministry of Economy, approved the establishment of 33 new companies, among which 17 are joint stock companies whose total authorised capital amounts to LE731mn, and has issued capitals of LE132,330mn. Sixteen companies are limited liability companies.

Nature's Best — Naturally

THE FIRST health food shop in Egypt has opened its doors, supplying health-conscious customers with Nature's Best, fresh from Sekem Farms.

All vegetables are grown organically without pesticides. So is the wheat and rye that goes in the farmer's bread, which is baked the traditional way in a wood-burning oven. The cheese and milk products are as natural as can be.

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different. Not only is the cotton grown without chemicals, the whole processing of the cotton is done in an ecological manner, meeting the high standards of the European AKN natural textile regulations.

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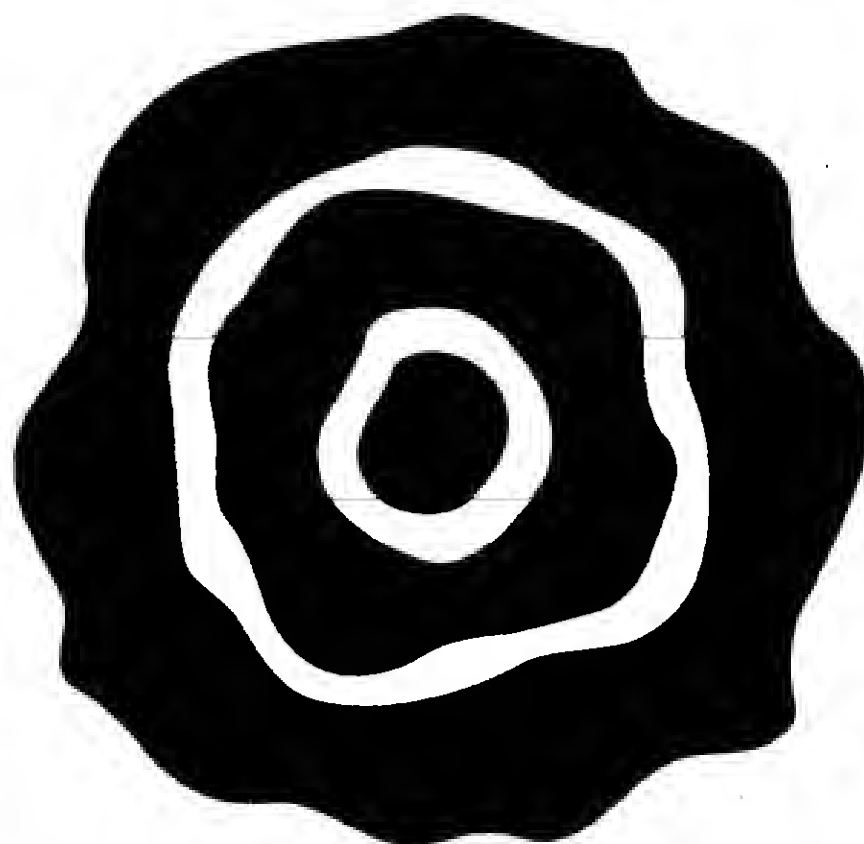
But you will find lots of other

things at Nature's Best from Sekem. There are herbal drinks and herbal remedies. You will find wooden toys and small cotton puppets designed to foster the fantasies of your children. You will find rugs and carpets.

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Bahrain Branch/Abu Dhabi Representative Office/Cairo Representative Office/Jeddah Representative Office/Tel Aviv Representative Office

Free trade discussed

LAST TUESDAY, the annual scientific conference of the Faculty of Law, Mansoura University, began a series of sessions seeking to discuss the future of the Egyptian economy within the context of trade liberalisation. The Ministry of Education sponsored the two-day conference.

The subject matter of the conference is both controversial and topical, especially with the events of the past few weeks. Ahmed Amin Hamza, chairman of the conference, said that holding the conference reflects the faculty's interest in studying and analysing current legal and economic issues.

Among the chosen topics discussed during the conference were trade liberalisation theories and their repercussions as well as the alternatives. Also discussed were the GATT and its impact on the food and agriculture sectors, Ahmed Gamaleddin Moussa, secretary-general of the conference, stated.

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No recent crisis has produced the confusion and popular outrage in Britain caused by the discovery that the so-called mad cow disease may be transmitted to humans through the consumption of infected beef. For several years, scientists and government officials have been assuring the public that the lethal brain disease could not be passed on to humans and that, therefore, meat consumption was safe for adults and children alike.

So when the government last week announced that there might be a risk — albeit a small one — that the disease can be transmitted to humans, the public became frantic, the meat market crashed, the European Union banned British meat and everyone became suspicious of anything the scientists had to say about the whole matter.

What the scientists did say was that mad cow disease — scientifically known as Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) — may have infected up to 10 people with a human equivalent called Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD), but that, since 1989, the risk of infection has been almost negligible because of safety guidelines introduced in that year.

The scale of the potential economic crisis is big enough to force the British government to contemplate the slaughter of more than half of the country's herds — a bill estimated at around 4.5 billion pounds (\$6.8 billion). But the human loss will not be accurately known for several more years because of the 10-year incubation period associated with CJD.

Although mad cow disease and its human equivalent, CJD, are still thought to be a British problem, the affair has opened a number of debates which are relevant to the whole world, particularly to developing countries. One is about the role of the state in regulating consumer goods. The beef scare illustrates the increasing need, all over the world, for regulatory systems which guarantee the safety of products offered to the public. The big consumer goods companies have become so enormous that both regulatory authorities and the public alike have little chance in matching their strength. Think of the resources such companies are capable of using to research and market their products, or the money they pour into officials pockets in countries where such practice is possible.

The solution, however, cannot be to tighten regulations blindly or to set limitations on the right — and duty — of companies to conduct their own research and market their products. The real safe-

Barking mad Britain

British bovine madness has become the mother of all crises, but what of human stupefaction, asks Ziad Baha Eldin in London



guard is acting as follows: One, the state regulatory authorities should be provided with a continuous flow of resources and technical know-how, allowing them at least the chance to match the skills and knowledge of the producing and marketing giants. Two, consumer societies and lobbies should be promoted and encouraged to act as watchdogs over the whole range of consumer products. Neither action is at all prominent in developing countries.

The mad cow crisis in Britain has also re-opened the debate on the role of science in policy-making and the extent to which government policy should — and can — rely on existing scientific evidence. Since 1986, the British government has known of a

mad cow disease epidemic in British herds and, since 1989, of the possibility of the disease being transmitted to humans. Over the past decade, it has tightened the guidelines for meat production.

But throughout those years, the conservative government maintained that beef was safe because no scientific explanation could be found for the possible transmission of the disease. The implication is startling: as long as there was no scientific explanation, it was reasonable to deny the possibility that the disease could be transmitted. In other words, the explanation took precedence over the phenomenon itself. Only last week, and only after scientists unwillingly admitted to the relationship between BSE and CJD, did Prime Minister John

Major's government concede the possibility of a link.

To blame the British government for acting on what it described as "the best existing scientific evidence" would be unfair. There is no doubt that it is any government's duty to act in accordance with the best scientific evidence available at any point in time. But scientific evidence is continually changing and making yesterday's realities today's myths or vice versa. The problem is not reliance on science, but over-confidence in its accuracy.

At a time when everyone is talking about the current revolution in information technology, the essence of scientific knowledge seems to be gradually escaping us: science has to allow for a certain de-

gree of inaccuracy and its relative and changing nature has to allow for doubt. In other words, there is nothing more unscientific than the blind and uncritical belief in the accuracy of science.

This is not to say that we should abandon scientific knowledge, nor that we should replace it with unfounded and unreasonable explanations. Instead, our understanding of science and of scientific knowledge has to be critical and allow for the most important safeguard of all time: common sense.

Submitting to a blind faith in science as it exists today is at the heart of the mad cow disease crisis. Cows in Britain are believed to have caught the disease because of the type of fodder they were given in the 1980s. The cows were given the remains of sheep which were infected with scrapie, a disease similar to BSE. The question is: why was the poor cow, a herbivore since the beginning of time, suddenly turned into a meat-eater and fed the remains of sheep? The answer is typical: economically it made sense and scientifically there was no evidence to suggest that they should not be given this fodder. But what about common sense? Well, that good old traditional ally of mankind was ignored because "scientific" evidence was given preference.

This remarkable lack of common sense is, obviously, not peculiar to British society, but is truly a global phenomenon, driven all over the world by economic rationality and profitability and supported by a blind faith in short-term scientific wisdom. Try, for instance, reading the list of ingredients which go into making a loaf of bread to be sold in any well-known supermarket in the industrialised world. You could be excused for thinking they were the components of a chemical fertiliser. Such bread is available because there is no scientific evidence to suggest that the chemicals and preservatives that have gone into it are harmful.

Not by chance, the chemical additives make perfect marketing sense; this sort of bread will not lose its shape, colour or taste for six weeks. If, 10 years later, it turns out that this bread causes a new disease that kills, just as it turned out that asbestos and mad cow beef do, then we can always say that 10 years ago there was no scientific evidence to suggest that bread with a six week lifespan could in any manner be harmful.

Are we any better off in the not-so-developed world? Probably not, but at least we live in blissful ignorance; our bread is not labelled and we are never told how mad our cows have become.

'Final solution' for Chechnya

Last week the Russian army destroyed more Chechen villages, while Yeltsin pledged freedom and democracy for the republic. Faiza Rady watches the Russian president's pre-election drive

"The people are afraid to go out. When they have to go and fetch water, all they can do is run, wondering where the next missile is coming from," said Oleg, a civilian venturing out on the streets of Samashki — one of the numerous Chechen villages and towns which the Russian army assaulted last week. As artillery and aircraft tried to beat the separatist Chechen resistance into submission, only stray dogs and a few cows still wandered along the rubble-strewn streets of this once prosperous agricultural community, 35km west of the capital Grozny.

Oleg, who fled the war-torn capital hoping that Samashki would offer him a refuge, is one of the unfortunate 5,000 — from an original population of 13,000 — who were unable to flee for their lives before the most recent Russian onslaught began. The town was first attacked in April last year, when Russian troops burned homes, threw grenades into cellars and summarily executed people in "cleansing" operations. "This time around it was much worse," explained Oleg. "They destroyed the entire town."

The offensive against Samashki is part of a broader Kremlin plan to wipe out the separatist rebel forces led by democratically elected Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudayev, a former high-ranking general in the Soviet army. Starting on 16 March, the Russian army forced village administration after village administration to choose between signing accords to evict separatist fighters from their communities or face military reprisal. Russian President Boris Yeltsin is apparently intent on pushing the separatists into the southern highlands and off newspaper front pages — well ahead of the 16 June presidential elections.

In a 31 March televised address to the nation, Yeltsin announced a unilateral cessation of hostilities effective on 1 April but said that there were no

"simple and speedy solutions" to the Chechen problem and hence only a partial and phased withdrawal of troops — effective immediately — was possible. "We are ready for a dialogue on the status of the Chechen Republic," he said. But Yeltsin also refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the claims made by separatists, whom he continued to describe as "criminals", "bandits" and "terrorists" until the eve of his address.

Then, Yeltsin changed his tune announcing that he would "hold talks with the Dudayev side through mediators". He also promised to organise "free and democratic" parliamentary elections in which "the interests of the entire population should be represented". Critics charged that Yeltsin's plan had little oomph to offer, claiming that he was only paying lip service to freedom, democracy and political representation in a pre-election campaign stunt, while continuing to dismiss the Chechen people's national aspirations.

"Unfortunately, we have learnt from experience that the Russian government has over kept its word," commented a Chechen fighter. "We must not forget that this is the same president who announced in December 1994 in Grozny that bombing had ceased, even as his aircraft continued their bombardment," said Chechen Field Commander Doku Makhsayev.

According to Interfax, 120 villages from a total of 365 have so far agreed to sign deals with the military and the Moscow-installed Chechen government. Meanwhile, the military continued to bomb villages until 31 March — regardless of their stand-

ing is still intact. On 30 March, General Vyacheslav Tikhomirov, commander of the Russian troops, publicly apologised for the bombing of Katyr-Yurt, which killed a family of nine, left many wounded and heavily damaged homes.

On 24 March, the village of Stary Akhkol was bombed and subjected to intense artillery fire, while troops besieged the communities of Golskoye, Akhazurovo and Komsovol'skoye — hide-outs for some 500 Chechen fighters, the Russian command stated. Further assaults were launched against the regions of Vedeno and Nozhai-Yurt in the southeast — rebel strongholds that were heavily bombed throughout 1995.

In Grozny, the military tightened security and brought in reinforcements to guard administration buildings, ostensibly in preparation for a rebel offensive. Little traffic is moving in the capital, residents are staying out of sight and minimal trade is going on in the central market. The scene in Grozny is reminiscent of World War II, reported Karel Bartak in *Le Monde Diplomatique*. As a result of the Russian occupation only 100,000 of the original more than 400,000 residents remain.

The ruins of the once proud city, historically known as the "jewel of the northern Caucasus", appear like the disembowelled remnants of an ancient ghost town. In their indiscriminate bombing of the capital, the Russians destroyed nine out of the city's 10 hospitals, and many patients are now left untreated. The air force also bombed the fashionable residential neighbourhood around the parliament building into rubble. Only the foundation of the parliament

building is still intact.

Ruslan Khasbulatov, a former president of the Supreme Soviet and the Chechen leader of the opposition to Dudayev, recently addressed an urgent appeal to the Russian parliament denouncing the appalling situation in Chechnya, including the flagrant violations of human rights. "Out of a population of 2.2 million, more than 40,000 civilians were killed over a 15-month period and more than 400,000 have become refugees," he said. "Moreover, the army refuses to let relief aid workers provide the besieged civilian population with essential food and medical supplies. Before the most recent onslaught, Yeltsin told the Russian National Security Council in a closed session that 'a rapid and decisive military victory was necessary, regardless of the costs'. And the military response was swift. The politics of military terrorism adopted by the Kremlin against a Muslim people speak for themselves."

Other voices echoed Khasbulatov's statement. On 26 March human rights monitors from the Vienna-based 52-nation Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe issued a report condemning the Russian army for using excessive force against civilians and engaging in robbery, looting and arson. A series of attacks against villages with a strong rebel presence "have to be qualified as warfare against the civilian population", the report said. Even Washington, usually a staunch Yeltsin ally, demanded that the indiscriminate attacks against the civilian village populations be immediately halted.

Yeltsin's decision to invade the tiny Caucasian republic in December 1994 raised many questions.

President Dudayev had declared independence back in August 1991, after the attempted coup against the Yeltsin administration. Why then did Yeltsin wait three years before contesting Chechen independence? The political climate in the first few years of the '90s, explained political analyst Bernard Frederick, favoured secession. Ukraine, the Central Asian republics and Russia itself had just declared their independence and Yeltsin's aim had been to dismantle the Soviet Union. At the time Yeltsin did not react to Chechnya's nationalist claims since its separatist course favoured his own strategy.

Three years later, however, Yeltsin decided to force the renegade republic back to the fold. The new political situation facilitated the economic reconstitution of the ex-Soviet Union in the form of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). During the October 1994 CIS summit, the assembled leaders unanimously agreed to create a co-ordination committee that would pave the way towards economic re-unification. Moscow then managed to gain control of the committee by imposing its economic hegemony on the other semi-bankrupt and weakened republics.

Russia manoeuvred to control the CIS by appropriating the majority of its voting power. Beyond the loose federation project, Yeltsin aspires to revive the superpower status of the former Soviet Union under Russian leadership and the "free market" banner. Yet this can only be realised if the geopolitical area of the Russian republics is kept intact through the suppression of all nationalist movements — by all means necessary. Considering the stakes, it is highly improbable that Yeltsin's negotiations with Dudayev will lead to Chechen self-determination.

For the love of NATO

THE ALBANIAN capital, Tirana, hosted a Balkan security meeting this week. Defence ministers from the United States, Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Turkey and Italy took part in talks on Sunday and Monday. A representative from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was also attending the meeting. US Defence Secretary William Perry said that the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is the principal guarantor of European security. He also stressed the importance of seeking to forge a separate relationship of cooperation with Russia.

Many of the region's nations are enthusiastically courting the West and seeking NATO membership. Greece refused to take part in the southern Balkans security conference arguing that other Balkan states — the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Romania, Croatia and Bosnia — should have been invited.

Farewell the welfare state

THE EMPLOYMENT and economic ministers of the Group of Seven richest nations (G7) — the United States, Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Japan — ended a summit meeting on jobs on Tuesday in the northern French city of Lille. The seven nations agreed on some broad back-to-work initiatives, including giving welfare recipients more incentives to find work and better vocational training.

The final statement of the summit did not, however, mention minimum standards for work conditions or social welfare, despite France's advocacy of such a clause. The G7 countries have a collective 22 million unemployed. The globalisation of the world economy is causing painful social changes, such as lost jobs in traditional manufacturing industries. New "McJobs" in service industries, which pay little and offer next to no security, now proliferate.

Return of the bear?

OVER the last several months, the former Soviet bloc nations of East and Central Europe have been seeking closer ties with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Naturally, the Russians are worried by these developments. At any rate, Russia is making moves to group together some of the nations that made up the former Soviet Union into something more durable and closely integrated than the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) — a loose, voluntary grouping of 12 states.

Russia signed a treaty with the predominantly Slav republic of Belarus, and Russian President Boris Yeltsin dispatched his defence minister to Georgia to mend deteriorating relations between the two nations.

The treaty of union between Belarus and Russia was signed by Yeltsin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko in the Belarusian capital, Minsk, on Tuesday. Under its provisions, the two Slav nations will set up a joint supranational council, with an executive committee acting as a government to implement its decisions. An inter-parliamentary congress with equal representation from both countries will also be set up.

Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze (right) shakes hands with visiting Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev in the Georgian capital, Tbilisi. Grachev and his Georgian counterpart Vardiko Nadibaidze signed



Qiao Shi, chairman of China's National People's Congress, with Yeltsin photo: AFP

the political agenda was the issue of American "targeted sanctions" against China. American President Bill Clinton is under increasing attack at home for making too many concessions to the People's Republic. Many Western political observers believe that the Clinton administration can deflect criticisms on Capitol Hill by imposing selective sanctions against China for exporting sensitive nuclear technology to Third World nations. Russia, too, is under tremendous pressure from its Western financial backers to stop selling military technology abroad.

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Uncle Árpád's story

Hungary will surmount the Balkan and Kremlin clouds cast on its economic and security prospects, predicted Hungarian President Árpád Göncz in an exclusive interview with Gamal Mkrumah



President Árpád Göncz (photo: Reuters)

"The poet's voice need not merely be the record of the man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail," said American novelist William Faulkner when he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949. President Árpád Göncz of Hungary is no Nobel laureate, yet, he is a down-to-earth man, affectionately known in his native Hungary as Uncle Árpád. I ventured to ask Hungary's president who was his favourite writer. His answer was swift and categorical. "Faulkner," he said without the slightest hesitation. There is something understandable about why President Göncz, who has lived all of his life in somewhat insular and parochial Hungary, has Faulkner, who lived most of his life in provincial Mississippi, as his favourite writer. It is shockingly indicative of the fact that today's Central and East European rulers are decidedly pro-American in their sympathies. The Martin Gorkys are summarily ignored.

It was after all, the United States Treasury and the International Monetary Fund which provided the financial support that underpinned Hungarian privatisation and economic liberalisation reforms. "American fast food restaurants, schools and churches are proliferating throughout Hungary," chuckled a Hungarian businessman at a Hungarian-Egyptian businessmen's meeting at Qubba Palace last week on the occasion of an official visit by President Göncz.

These are the most determining days Hungary has known since Stalin's death in 1953 and the Soviet quelling of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. President Göncz, once a humble translator of the works of Faulkner, Hemingway, Scott, Updike and Thomas Wolfe into his native Magyar, wrote his first work *The Sandal Makers* in 1974 at the age of 52. Writing became one of the "props and pillars" that helped Göncz, the anti-Communist political activist, "endure and prevail".

"The challenges were too much at times, but we had to work through these things. And we have," President Göncz said. *The Sandal Makers*, an allegorical play depicting Göncz's own prison experiences under the guise of a 15th century Hungarian trial for heresy, was warmly received among Hungary's literati. Naturally, the Communist authorities were not as enthusiastic. "I spent six years in Communist jails," he smiled. He is not bitter, I thought, hoping to convince myself. "It was unbearable yet it had to be borne," President Göncz quickly added. Some outsiders might not consider President Göncz to be a writer of the same calibre as Czech President Vaclav Havel, but in his own country he commands considerable popularity — both as a shrewd politician and as an accomplished author.

Árpád Göncz has tried his hands at almost everything. At one stage he was a farm labourer, then an intellectual and finally a politician. A former vice-president of the Hungarian PEN Club and present honorary president of his country's Writers' Union, he is the founding member and spokesman of Hungary's Network of Free Initiatives and one of the founding fathers of the Alliance of Free Democrats, the senior partner of Hungary's ruling coalition. In 1944, the young Göncz joined the underground Hungarian anti-Fascist resistance and was wounded to a gun battle with German troops. Hungary was liberated by the Red Army on 4 April 1945, but the Red Army later crushed the 23 October-4 November 1956 Hungarian Revolution.

Göncz, himself a former Communist, was a close associate of Imre Nagy, the leader of the anti-Soviet government who was executed in 1956. For his part in the anti-Soviet uprising Göncz was persecuted and imprisoned, but as a leading dissident he learnt to work closely with Western human rights organisations. What was the worst feature of the Communist legacy? "Its atrocious human rights record," was his unequivocal answer.

"We had a deficit of freedom for 40 long years. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union," President Göncz said. "The 1956 Revolution was essentially about popular participation in the decision-making process. In Hungary today, the policymaking debate is a public affair. Long gone are the days when the party line was religiously adhered to," he added.

"Lack of freedom was the bane of life under Communism," he said. Still, it has been a bumpy ride since President Göncz came to power in 1990. When he took office, Hungary was still glowing from the spring that came to East Europe in the autumn of 1989 — a strange reversal of seasons. Like the Czechs' 1968 Prague

Spring, Hungary had its own awful autumn in 1956. Like the Czech Republic, Hungary also had its own "velvet revolution". But it was somewhat more low key than those of its neighbours. Still, it was an intoxicating time. These memories come vividly to President Göncz's mind and he spoke animatedly of those days. They were the culmination of the time — the 1970s and 1980s — when he and other Hungarian anti-Communist "poet activists" produced the underground magazine *Beszelo*.

President Göncz, together with his Young Turks of the *Beszelo* days, are still seething about what they see as the "catastrophic Communist legacy". But there are other underlying dynamics that add to the strain of their newly begotten power: the deregulation of the economy and the rapid pace of privatisation, impending NATO and European Union membership, and last, but not least, the war in neighbouring Bosnia that took all the headlines.

"There are large Hungarian minorities in Austria, Croatia, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The Magyar communities in these countries are not recent arrivals," stressed President Göncz. "The Hungarian communities in neighbouring countries have been living there for over 1,000 years. But we must stress human rights: the Hungarian minorities must be guaranteed their cultural rights. They must be free to exercise their right to use their language and have their own schools." The European Court of Human Rights was set up in 1950 to hear cases of suspected violations of the human rights convention. The court's rulings are binding on the 39 members of the Council of Europe. "Hungary is a member and so are most of our neighbours where large Hungarian minorities live," he said.

Does Hungary have its eye on any neighbouring land? "We certainly do not have any territorial ambitions on any of our neighbours. Some two million Hungarians live in the Romanian province of Transylvania. They live alongside five million Romanians. Five million Romanians are equivalent to half the Hungarian population today," Göncz commented. "We hope that the Hungarian

communities in neighbouring countries will continue to live peacefully as they have done for centuries and that their human and cultural rights and security will be guaranteed."

While it is not appropriate to make a lengthy detour into Hungarian history, it is relevant to recall that long after Vienna fiercely rebuffed Turkish troops who laid siege to the city in 1529, Hungary remained an Ottoman possession. Similarly, long after Vienna became the capital of the West European democracy, Austria, and shed its Nazi past, Budapest was suffering from the after-effects of the failed 1956 uprising against the occupying Soviet troops and remained firmly behind the Iron Curtain.

President Göncz is captivated by his people's history. Only in 1687, "with blood and iron", were the Turks ousted, when the Magyars defeated their Ottoman overlords at the Battle of Mohács. But the Hungarians' victory was hollow, for soon afterwards Hungary came under Habsburg rule; the dream of national security was once again denied.

The Magyar tribes, the ancestors of present-day Hungarians, were led by Prince Árpád when they crossed the Carpathian Mountains in 896AD. Today's Magyars are led by President Árpád after crossing the threshold of 40 years of Communist rule.

The Árpád line of Magyar leadership died out in 1308. Ironically, Hungarian national self-identity is now so inextricably linked to Europe that it can afford to celebrate proudly its ancient Asiatic roots. Hungary's open plains have been easily accessible to invading forces. In 1241 the Mongol Golden Horde conquered the country, leaving death and devastation in its wake. The same path of blood was trodden by Attila, the tribal Huns' warrior-leader, in the fifth century when he laid the Roman Empire to waste and settled in Hungary.

Hordes of Hungarian horsemen descended on Central Europe from Iran and Turkey over a millennium ago. This year Hungarians celebrate the 1,100th anniversary of their ancestors' settlement of their present homeland. "Turkish and Iranian tribes moved into the Hungarian

plains and Europe became their home," President Göncz said. Even today, Hungarian music is a curious mix of Magyar, Turkish and Gypsy influences. "Our language is a mixture of Iranian, Turkish, Slavic, Germanic and Latin influences. But essentially, the Magyar language is unrelated to any other in Europe save Estonian and Finnish. We were baptised a thousand years ago in Europe and there is no return," he chuckled.

But, now as then, security is a major concern. Lying at the heart of Europe, Hungary is at the crossroads between east and west, north and south, Atlantic and Urals, Baltic and Mediterranean. Defence budget cuts and the soaring costs of new sophisticated weapons make it increasingly difficult for Hungary, and other Central and East European nations that were members of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact, to go it alone in maintaining their security arrangements.

Commenting on the prospects of his country's admission to NATO, Czech President Havel said last week that NATO membership "unfortunately depends not solely on me nor my government". Hungary's President Göncz was more confident. "We did not ask for NATO membership even though for us it is very important. We are closer to NATO membership than any of the other East European nations. NATO forces now have a logistics base in Hungary. We did not join NATO: NATO joined Hungary," he asserted.

Why is NATO of such critical importance to Hungary? Does Hungary feel threatened by Russia? "No, we do not feel threatened by Russia. Russia would be mistaken if it feels threatened by Hungary. We want to be integrated into the security system of Europe," Göncz said. "Accession to NATO means that Hungarian security will be stronger." Russian President Boris Yeltsin, however, wants a ban on stationing nuclear weapons or Western troops in Central and East Europe.

But Russia is opposed to NATO membership for its former Warsaw Pact satellites. A fortnight ago, Russia and Belarus signed a union agreement.

President Göncz dismissed the suggestion that Moscow would sabotage Washington's plan to incorporate East and Central European nations into NATO. American Secretary of State Warren Christopher visited the Czech capital, Prague, a fortnight ago to meet leaders of 12 Central and East European countries — including Hungary — that are hoping to join NATO in spite of Russian disapproval.

President Göncz was optimistic about the prospects for Hungary's entry into NATO. "The [Hungarian] people did not want to be part of COMECON and the Warsaw Pact or to be within the Soviet orbit," President Göncz said. Conventional wisdom dictated that small nations were of no consequence in international affairs. Forced incorporation into Russia's own security arrangements was a tradition that hung around the neck of the former Soviet-bloc states like an albatross.

Former NATO Secretary-General Manfred Wörner said once that if attacked [by post-Cold War Russia], Hungary, a former Soviet satellite state, would not be forsaken. Today, American AWACS reconnaissance warplanes fly freely in Hungarian air space. NATO membership must be seen against the backdrop of severe cutbacks in Hungary's military spending.

Concerning NATO's 1994 decision to extend its membership eastwards, current NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana last week stated: "We shall continue [in our efforts to extend NATO membership eastwards] prudently and openly, but we shall continue."

To the north of Hungary, what was Czechoslovakia split into separate Czech and Slovak republics. To the south, what was President Josef Broz Tito's exemplary federation disintegrated into rival warring states. Hungary was spared a fate on account of its ethnic homogeneity.

Hungary was both safe and prosperous. Refugees came from across Hungary's southern borders and from opposing sides in the war: Bosnians, Croats and Serbs. They came from every part of the former Yugoslavia, once regarded as the very

epitome of stability and peace. Ethnic Hungarian minorities began to pour in as well. War in the Balkans and the threat of it spilling across the border into Hungary itself have, of course, been at the heart of Hungary's resolve to join NATO.

For Hungary, an irksome fact related to the war in Bosnia has been the loss of revenue. Hungary exported \$460 million worth of commodities to Yugoslavia in 1990 and imported goods valued at some \$194 million. Hungary lost an estimated \$2.5 billion after the United Nations embargo was imposed on Yugoslavia. Hungarian State Railways is still owed \$53.3 million by the Yugoslav Railways.

Still, "50 per cent of all foreign investments in Eastern and Central Europe are in Hungary," President Göncz said. Moreover, "60 per cent of Hungary's gross domestic product is now in private hands," he added. Mohamed Ibrahim Dakrury, the head of the 25-year-old, Cairo-based Egyptian-Hungarian Friendship Association, predicted that "1997 will be the year of real economic growth in Hungary". President Göncz is also bullish. "In 1995, our exports increased by over 18 per cent, while our imports grew by 10 per cent. During the past five years, 70 per cent of the state sector has been privatised. And the privatisation of the rest of the state assets will be completed before the end of 1997," he said.

There are some 400 Egyptian who received their PhDs at Hungarian universities," Dakrury remarked. "Unfortunately, the commercial turnover between our two countries has been decreasing since the beginning of the 1990s," President Göncz lamented.

I caught up with President Göncz's Minister of Trade and Industry Imre Dunai last week. He was nearing the end of a hectic flurry of dinner parties, meetings with politicians and businessmen and endless speeches devoted to cementing economic and political links between Egypt and Hungary. He posed for a photo and then our discussion turned to Hungary's economic future. Dunai was on his way to Paris to sign Hungary's official accession to the OECD (Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development) after his 25-28 March visit to Egypt. "Hungary will be a fully fledged member of the OECD in May 1996," he said.

"The Hungarians are a sophisticated people," joked Hungary's Ambassador to Cairo, Ernő Juhász, who has been in Egypt — on and off — for the past 33 years. True, Hungary was never a basket case. Even under Communist rule, the country prospered and was the most dynamic economy behind the Iron Curtain. "Budapest was decidedly the most Western of East European capitals," Ambassador Juhász added.

Hungary did not dally with the idea of introducing minor reforms. Hungarians found it easier to accept that change was irreversible precisely because economic deregulation was radical. The fact that Hungary had a relatively well developed infrastructure and other prerequisites for a bustling business environment gave the country a head start in coping with capitalism. Unlike Russia or Poland, Hungary escaped the tenacious attacks on its economic reform programme by Communist sympathisers. Some of Hungary's neighbours opted for gradual reform and the results were distressing. In Romania last year, the gross domestic product dropped by 30 per cent, six years after the execution of Nicolae Ceausescu. "We started economic reforms six years before the others," Göncz commented.

The president brushed aside hair-splitting distinctions between what he called the left-of-centre ruling coalition partners in Hungary. "Unlike some of our East European neighbours we have no reformed Communists in Hungary. We have no Communist ciphers," he said.

The people are voting Communists back into office in Russia and Poland and elsewhere. Could the Communists come back in Hungary? "If the people look back, they will not forget the lack of freedom," President Göncz explained. "In Hungary we have a Social Democratic Party, we have many left-of-centre parties, but we do not have any Communist parties. We have a left-of-centre government which is both democratic and pragmatic," he added.

Large-scale privatisation plans have largely failed in Poland. In Romania, Russia and Ukraine the very thought of large-scale privatisation sets off alarm bells. Many former East European nations have been forced to rethink their economic deregulation plans because of untold social woes. Hungary faces far less daunting a task.

Walesa's woes

This week, Lech Walesa, Poland's former president, ousted in general elections three months ago, returned to his old Gdansk shipyard job as an electrician. Walesa claimed that he was desperately poor. "I'm without money for living, and it's necessary for me to work," he exclaimed.

After Walesa, 52, left office in December, the tax authorities froze his bank accounts, claiming that Walesa did not pay taxes in 1989 on a \$1 million payment from Warner Brothers for the rights to film his life story. After being photographed at the historic hall where the Solidarity Trade Union he headed was legalised in a 1980 agreement with the Communist Government, Walesa went to breakfast with an old friend.

Walesa claims that officials in the new Communist government of President Aleksander Kwasniewski deliberately want to humiliate him and financially ruin him. Walesa was forbidden from collecting the customary "farewell bonus" for high-ranking Polish officials.

There are those who see the actions of the former Polish president as arrogant. Walesa refuses to appear in public with President Kwasniewski, but was chauffeured driven to the Gdansk shipyard in a state-owned Mercedes Benz. Kwasniewski stated that he favours a pension for Walesa. "The sooner [Walesa gets the pension] the better," he said.

Walesa wants the pension to be valid for popularly elected presidents only, which would rule out the last Communist president, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, who banned Solidarity, declared martial law in Poland and imprisoned Walesa and other Solidarity leaders.

In a separate development, the new Communist government is seeking private investors to buy the state's 60 per cent stake in the Gdansk shipyard (photo: AFP)



For the love of NATO

Farewell the others

Al-Ahram Weekly

People matter

The most important issue concerning the United Nations sanctions against Sudan is the welfare of the Sudanese people. Yes, the Sudanese government has an awful lot to answer for. But the Sudanese people did not vote the government of General Omar Hassan Al-Bashir into office. The regime, bolstered by its spiritual guide, National Islamic Front leader Hassan Al-Turabi, is not a popularly elected one. Therefore, the Sudanese people must not be abandoned to suffer a terrible fate of deprivation because of the mischievous machinations of their leaders.

Egypt, people and government, stand by the Sudanese people. We in the region have witnessed the terrible tragedy of the Iraqi people, who are paying the price of the mistakes and miscalculations of the Iraqi leadership. The UN sanctions imposed on Iraq have caused untold suffering in what used to be one of the most prosperous Arab countries. The Sudanese people are today suffering the ill effects of their leaders' economic policies and political blunders.

But we are still left with the question of how to deal with the Turabi-Bashir regime. Egypt is the country with the biggest axe to grind with Khartoum because Sudan harbours the accused in the attempted assassination of President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa last June. Ironically, economic sanctions sometimes only help to bolster autocratic regimes by getting people to rally around the national cause.

It is precisely for this reason that it comes as a shocking surprise that United States Ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright, at an informal meeting of Non-Aligned Nations of the UN Security Council, chastised Egypt for the weakness of its resolution to castigate Sudan. Egypt is most concerned about the welfare of the Sudanese people and the territorial integrity of Sudan itself. Egypt cannot possibly be expected to support a trade and air embargo on two of its immediate neighbours, Libya and Sudan, and compromise Arab economic interests and national security. Egypt must of necessity be wary of any economic or trade sanctions imposed on its Arab neighbours. Egypt will never abandon its Arab brethren.

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'Yellow peril' to 'Islamic terror'

Once, the Chinese were demonised as the "yellow peril", writes **Fawzi Mansour**; now, phenomenal economic growth rates have made China a power to contend with. It is the Arabs' turn: branded terrorists and zealots, humiliated and exploited, they have become the bogeymen of Western imperialism

Edward Said knows all about it: he documented, analysed and explained it all in *Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism*. But readers of his last article in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "War on Islamic Terror", who are not familiar with these works may need to be reminded that the current Western practice of selectively setting up other peoples or cultures as fiendish enemies and attributing sinister motives to their every legitimate act of protest or self-defence against aggression is not limited to the world of Islam and to the case of Indian resistance to imperialism cited in Said's article.

The practice of demonising the enemy is universal, and as old as the hills. In the West, however, with the rise of capitalism and its concomitant transformation into a world system of Western domination and exploitation of economically less developed areas and peoples, that practice first became a highly popular art form, pioneered by essayists, novelists, editorialists and even poets, with a curious assortment of cleverness not lagging far behind. Then, in the 20th century, it was elevated to a pseudo-science. With the help of impressive-sounding academic titles and affiliations, an elaborate data base, a gigantic publicity machine and extensive networks of secret services, some third-rate minds posturing as scientists (the Huntingtons, Fukuyamas, etc) assumed the roles of prophets, seers and saviours of civilization. Their main function is to explain to their peoples why all the wars previously proclaimed to end all wars were inevitably followed by other wars — against previous allies, against hitherto unsuspected enemies, etc — and why the intervening periods of relative peace or cold wars must, alas, be dominated by preparations for war against various lurking enemies.

In highly developed capitalist economies, this is a vital function. Internal social cohesion, normally severely strained by the contradictions of capitalist development, requires to cement it to the continuous existence or creation of external enemies. War against competitors, if won, may give a highly developed country special advantages which can be reflected in the standard of living of its people. The spoils of wars of conquest and domination against less developed countries are certain to yield a continuous flow of surplus which can be shared among the various classes of the developed economy, thus softening the sharp edges of their contradictions. This is the real basis of the famous "social contract" which, for nearly a century now, has dominated the policies of western countries.

In addition, as the Keynesians would be the first to recognise (though they may not openly admit it), a vigorous war industry, producing both for local needs and for export (especially to Third World markets) is a mighty apodictic capable of working miracles of rejuvenation on cyclically flagging mature capitalist economies.

Wars, preparation for wars, and fostering attitudes receptive to wars are thus a necessary part of the mechanism of capitalism. Since war and war-like activities against Third World trouble spots — "pacification", "establishing law and order", fighting the "terrorist activities" automatically attributed to national liberation movements — are usually less costly and more remunerative, creating in Western societies a frame of mind perpetually receptive to them, is an essential task. Historically, this basically economic function has been supplemented, embellished and camouflaged by the development in the West of racism, exclusivism and an inordinate sense of innate superiority to a degree never remotely approached in any other civilisation.

I have gone into some detail in this matter

in order to establish what I consider to be an essential point: that the contemporary campaign against "Islamic terror" and the presentation of Islam as the present threat to civilization are in essence not religiously motivated. They are propelled neither by the religious zealotry of certain sections of western societies, nor by what is perceived as the excesses and savage barbarities attributed to certain "Islamic" practices or acts of retribution, still less by a groundless fear of an 'Islamic re-conquest' of the Western world or its well-guarded hunting grounds in the Third World. Essentially, the current fever sponsored by certain quarters in the West against Islam and Islamism resembles the past fever against the Chinese "Yellow Peril" in being motivated by much more mundane considerations: the very nature of Western capitalist imperialism and its mode of functioning.

No doubt the old rivalries and confrontations between Islam and Western Christianity, their spatial proximities, even some of their affinities, and the sometimes impotent, indiscriminate and inarticulate response of some Muslim factions to the enormous iniquities, humiliations and wanton savageries practiced daily by the West or its stooges in some part of the Muslim world or the other, more particularly in the Middle East, add a special Islamic and anti-Islamic dimension to the mounting campaign against the Islamic world. But these are merely the spices which whet the appetite of Western aggression. The appetite itself emanates from and feeds upon something else: the fact that the Middle Eastern Muslim world, with its enormous riches and weaknesses, is one of the few great spaces still available where the West can soften its internal and external contradictions and extract the sustenance its stability requires.

The point is worth re-emphasising, because if lost sight of, the Muslim world risks accepting the terms — artfully and artificially defined by the adversary — of the on-going struggle as a struggle of religions. As a result, it will misread the nature of the contemporary world and the causes of its basic conflicts, a very grievous error leading to bad choices, mistaken strategies, wrong alliances and an unnecessarily long list of important enemies, especially among those who hold different beliefs, such as Buddhists, Confucians, Hindus and even those Muslims in Iran, East Asia, Africa and the US itself, whose version of Islam does not coincide with the officially dominant one.

More important still, giving the on-going conflict with the Arab world an essentially religious character — (as Israel and the West manoeuvre us into doing) — risks to alienate from the struggle the very substantial Christian communities which form an integral part of the Arab world and whose patriotism in the face of Western aggression — and only the historically illiterate and the bigots can question this — stands at least on a par with that of Muslims.

I do not wish to be misunderstood on this point. Religions naturally resist and combat domination by alien cultures and civilizations, especially when the latter have the habit of adding exploitation to humiliation. Accordingly, religious beliefs and sentiments, whether of Muslims or Christians, potentially work as a great liberating force against the type of domination practiced by the West against the Arab world. There is, however, a considerable difference between tapping this great liberating force and whipping up narrow religious frenzy, often manipulated by the ruling or would-be ruling classes for their own purposes, or remote-controlled by foreign interests, not just to discredit the beliefs and culture of the societies they want to dominate, but also to push them further down the road

of irrational behaviour and habits of thought. For if there is something the oppressors and exploiters fear more than anything else, it is the extension of the domain of reason in the conduct of personal and public affairs among the dominated peoples.

The achievements of the enemy-manufacturing industry burgeoning in the West need not be sustained. It all depends on the appropriateness of the responses of the peoples against whom that industry is directed. Nothing illustrates this point more vividly than the case of China.

Throughout the 19th century and much of the 20th it was the Chinese, not the Arabs, Muslims, Indians or Africans, who were consistently set up as the chief danger and enemy to Western civilization; so much so that they were regularly branded the "Yellow Peril". The reasons why China acquired that dubious distinction are varied. China in the 19th century was still the most technologically advanced civilization which the West had attempted to subjugate. Its enormous size, wealth and potentialities acted as a challenge to Western ambitions rather than as a deterrent. The Chinese people's strong sense of national identity and their awareness of the great civilization of which they were heirs, made them see the Western intruders and aggressors as barbarians to be fiercely resisted by all the means available to them.

In view of the then technical superiority of the West in the arts of warfare, these were not many, and tended to take the form of sporadic, indiscriminate, sometimes extremely fierce uprisings against Europeans, military and civilian alike, for both shared the same view of the Chinese as an inferior race, to be treated in the most humiliating way possible as a matter of principle. Of course, it was much more convenient for the Europeans and Americans — later joined also by the Japanese imperialists — to forget that they were the initial aggressors who waged savage wars and committed unprecedented atrocities in order to force open the doors of China, not just for unequal trade, but for the opium trade; to extract extra-territorial privileges for their subjects; to acquire areas free of Chinese where foreign power and laws held sway and to annex to themselves huge populous provinces. In short, the aim was to create a situation which was to be repeated later — with appropriate variations required by history or geography — in the Arab world.

By the end of the 19th century, respectable Americans could write about the Chinese as "morally the most debased people on the face of the earth" and label them the "Yellow Peril". The label was made to stick for nearly a century, thanks to slanted and lurid reporting and misrepresentation of the Chinese culture, habits of thought and strange ways, and the one-sided accounts of Chinese populist violence in times of uprisings — the only outlet left open to them against their foreign oppressors. After a short lull before and during the second world war caused by the Western-Chinese alliance against Japan, this demonisation of the Chinese people was resumed, this time not as a remote potential danger caused by the disparities between the rates of population increase in the West and in China, but as an immediate one, repeatedly invoked by such luminaries as Mr McNamara and the editorialists of the *London Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Herald Tribune*, because of "China's intention and growing capacity to bring about the annihilation of all that North America and Europe have built up".

This continued until around 1975. Less than 20 years later, Oksenberg (in *Newsweek*, 1 April 1996) could write that "China must be involved in shaping the post-Cold-War era."

And this means welcoming China to forums that are defining the future of the world: the World Trade Organisation, the Missile Technology Control Regime and even the G-7, and that "if leaders [of China] are threatened and demeaned, and their interests ignored they will surely behave in increasingly disruptive fashion". Rather than a lone voice in the wilderness, his call is part of a chorus of public opinion leaders who are now warning Clinton and Congress against the American fleet's foolhardy show of force along the China shores.

How did this change regarding opinion about China, from "Yellow Peril" to a respected world power to be courted, take place?

It is not just because China has become a nuclear power, China was branded a peril 20 years ago for that very same reason. Nor because it has become more accommodating to the West: it still jealously guards its independence both in internal and external matters as fiercely as it ever did since its great revolution. Essentially, the change took place because of its phenomenal economic growth — at an annual average of nine per cent from 1978 to 1994 — unequalled for a large country — with the expectation, based on Western sources, that in 2025 China's economy will be by far the largest in the world: 1.5 times the size of the US economy and 75 to 80 per cent that of America, Japan and Western European economies combined.

It would be an oversimplification to attribute this success — as many will do — to the more liberal policy promoted by Deng Xiaoping since 1978. Except during the unfortunate excesses of the Great Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), rates of growth under Mao were comparable to, and in some respects greater than, the rates achieved after him. Moreover, without the basic social structural transformations and the concentration on equipping the country with an integrated advanced industrial and technological base, which took place in Mao's period, the later rates of growth would have been impossible to achieve.

The economic achievement of China are not merely the results of appropriate economic policies and transformations. They are also the end results of other political, cultural and social transformations, without which it would have been impossible to force imperialism powers to stop talking about "Yellow Peril" and seek ways to court China's favour.

In the same way, it is not impossible to change Western attitudes and policies toward the Islamic and more particularly the Arab world — from hotbeds of terrorism and countries fit only for exploitation and humiliation to powers that are to be courted with the conciliatory of nations. But this can take place only if the peoples of these countries introduce radical changes in the way they conduct their own affairs — internal and external — and deal appropriately with the cruel challenges forced upon them.

This "miracle" cannot happen by simply following the Chinese example. Certainly there are great similarities, but there are even greater differences in the international environment, socio-economic and geo-strategic circumstances, internal socio-economic conditions, levels of technological development and in the cultural make-up. I believe that a close look into all this, if we are to escape "our present status as angry religious terrorists or as compliant Red Indians" is what Edward Said called for at the end of his article. To do that would require another article.

The writer is an Egyptian economist and former director for the Middle East Research Centre, Ain Shams University.

Security or peace?

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed questions whether tightening security measures in Gaza and the West Bank even more would not be counter-productive for the peace process as a whole

Palestinian-Israeli negotiations are not expected to resume until after the Israeli elections scheduled for the end of May. This means that the Israeli blockade of the West Bank and Gaza, which has imposed unprecedented hardship on the Palestinians, is unlikely to be lifted, or meaningfully moderated, before June at the earliest. At last month's Sharm El-Sheikh summit, it seems the Americans and Israelis reached a joint — un-declared — resolution to focus all efforts on the limited objective of preventing a recurrence of the suicide bomb attacks recently carried out in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Ashkelon. The idea behind the resolution is that preventing terrorist operations is a necessary, albeit not sufficient, condition for Shimon Peres' re-election as prime minister and the resumption of the peace process.

That the resolution was not unanimous is clear from the follow-up meeting in Washington last week, which revealed a divergence of views between Washington on one side and some European and Arab capitals, notably Paris and Cairo, on the other, over whether priority should be given at this stage to security or peace. In other words, should the war against terrorism be fought in the security arena, that is, by giving a higher role to intelligence agencies (the American approach), or the political arena, by alienating the suffering of the Palestinians and giving them hope in the peace process (the view of Arab and European leaders)?

At the summit itself, all the participants agreed that the coming period should be devoted to improving Peres' chances of re-election, and many Arab parties did not let the lack of relations with Israel deter them from sitting at the same table with Peres in order to help achieve that aim. Where the participants differed was over the extent to which a beleaguered Arafat should be helped

out of his predicament. Should he be required to repress all forms of opposition in the self-rule areas under the pretext of eliminating terrorism, even at the risk of provoking a Palestinian civil war? And, if such a war should break out, how to prevent inter-Arab contradictions from becoming even sharper than they already are?

The Sharm El-Sheikh summit itself betrayed a deep rift in Arab ranks: some Arab parties proposed its convocation, some were not invited, some participated because they felt they had no other choice and some declined the invitation to attend. Most interesting of all was Hafez Al-Assad's argument in justifying why he refused to take part. He said he had no objection to participating in a meeting convened under the auspices of the Madrid conference which had launched the peace process and could help salvage it. However, he was not prepared to lend his name to a conference held outside the Madrid framework for the sole purpose of combating terrorism, because terrorism was a word deeply shrouded in ambiguity and could not be defined as long as peace had not been defined.

Indeed, the notion of terrorism in our time has gone through various stages. Though antipodal to the notion of world order, it is nevertheless closely linked to it. During World War II, the world order which prevailed, at least as far as Europe was concerned, was the one Hitler tried to impose on unwilling peoples by force of arms. Resistance to Nazi occupation took many forms, including recourse to terrorist operations which claimed many civilian victims, because the

targets against which these operations could be directed were not always German military personnel. That is why when Germany was defeated, the Nazi world order collapsed, and the United Nations was founded, its charter, which endorsed the new world order as defined by the victorious Allies, provided that resistance to occupation by all available means, including violent means, is legitimate.

The end of the war, which ushered in a second stage of conflict, this time between the Allies themselves, also ushered in a new stage in the understanding of terrorism. Throughout the period of the Cold War, when the bipolar world order prevailed, the notion of terrorism acquired a certain ambivalence. In the eyes of the Soviet camp, which constituted one of the poles of the new order, national liberation was against colonial occupation were legitimate, even if they took the form of terrorist operations that sometimes claimed the lives not only of members of occupation forces, but of innocent civilians. The Western democracies making up the other pole of the bipolar world order, on the other hand, viewed terrorism as a crime against humanity, a crime to be exposed and condemned by the world community, and invoked them to discredit liberation movements in general.

Then came a third, post-Cold War, stage in which a different world order emerged and a different understanding of terrorism evolved. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Socialist camp, the pole which had supported national liberation movements disappeared. No longer was terrorism amenable to different in-

terpretations; it was now condemned in absolute terms, regardless of the fact that the provision in the UN Charter sanctioning the use of violence to resist occupation and achieve self-determination is still in force.

Thus the perception of terrorism over the past half century has been of a relative, not absolute, nature, defined less in terms of humanitarian and moral considerations than by the attitude adopted towards the occupation forces against whom terrorist acts were directed. As we have seen, when at a previous stage the occupying power was condemnable in absolute terms, the use of terrorism to resist it was regarded as a lesser evil than the occupation. Under the present world order, violent resistance is branded as terrorism, even when it is used against an unjust settlement of a specific conflict that is tilted in favour of one party at the expense of the other.

Hafez Al-Assad rightly pointed out, there can be no condemnation of terrorism without a definition of peace, and since peace is still to be negotiated, it cannot be defined. Moreover, terrorism cannot be condemned in absolute terms as long as the world order remains locked in a conflict-resolution pattern based on the balance of power between the protagonists. That is why political means should take precedence over security measures in combating terrorism. This is particularly true for the coming stage where there is no guarantee that the Labour Party will win the forthcoming Israeli elections, where a Likud victory would mean a renegotiation of much of what has already been negotiated, and where, even if Labour does win, the most contentious problems of all (Jerusalem, Palestinian sovereignty, the settlements, Israel's nuclear dimension, etc) still have to be resolved.

The sounds of summer

By **Naguib Mahfouz**

Rod El-Farag used to be a summer playground for Cairo's residents and one of its main attractions was the summer season of theatrical entertainments offered in the winter season the comedies of Kish Kish Bey would be offered, together with those starring Ali El-Kassar. In the summer the same plays would be initiated with Ezz El-Din standing in for Naguib El-Rhami as Kish Kish Bey and Fawzi Mounib giving a credible impersonation of Ali El-Kassar. Musical shows would be offered as well, and one of the most popular players of the time was Shams Qadri.

Rod El-Farag, at that time, consisted almost entirely of a series of wooden structures built along the bank of the Nile, with wooden fences dividing the casinos. Chairs were set up, and the price for entry to these casinos was two piasters, for which sum you were entitled to watch the programme and receive a drink.

I heard most of Sayed Darwish's songs for the first time at Rod El-Farag, performed by Ezz El-Din. I would go with my father or my brother, who was 22 years my senior. Later I used to get quite excited when I heard that there was going to be a radio programme of Darwish compositions, and I would eagerly tune in the station, only to realise that I had heard the majority of them before, sitting drinking ginger ale on the banks of the Nile in Rod El-Farag.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Elmaghrabi.

سازمان اطلاعات

Close up

Salama A. Salama

Belated spring clean

Egypt is becoming ever more aware of the dangers posed by industrial pollution which over the decades has resulted in a steady deterioration in the fabric of our environment. Nothing — water, air or soil — has escaped this degradation. But most importantly, neither has the Egyptian citizen, whose health, capacity for work and productivity have all been affected for the worse.

A few days ago I attended a symposium on industrial development and the environment, along with a number of leading industrialists. The aim was to draw attention to the seriousness of the problem, and to inform top and middle managers within industry of the dangers posed by industrial pollution, and to increase familiarity with measures that can be taken to mitigate against the worst forms of environmental degradation. The symposium stressed the importance of introducing cleaner production methods, based on advanced technology.

We all know that in certain areas, such as Helwan, residents are exposed to health and environmental dangers that result from the emission into the atmosphere of industrial waste, particularly from cement factories. The respiratory systems of tens of thousands of workers, children and adults, have been severely damaged. We also know that certain heavy industries, such as steel and cement, continue to employ obsolete techniques, discarded elsewhere in the world more than 25 years ago. Such production processes undoubtedly do some harm to good. There are, too, dozens of factories which off-load poisonous waste into the Nile, the main source of our drinking water and irrigation.

The environment law, issued in 1994, gave industrial plants of all kinds a period of grace of three years to conform to the standards stipulated by the law. Privatisation procedures, transferring the ownership of a great number of industrial establishments from the public to the private sector, have complicated the regulatory picture, placing the responsibility for ensuring that environmental targets are met on new shoulders. And this has happened at a time when Egypt, a GATT signatory, is obliged to abide by international trading regulations in a fiercely competitive international market.

Industrial pollution constitutes a thorny problem. It is perhaps one that Egyptian industry can cope with only by soliciting foreign aid. Already the government, in conjunction with the World Bank and some European banks, is studying the feasibility of creating a fund to assist companies and establishments in reducing levels of environmental pollution.

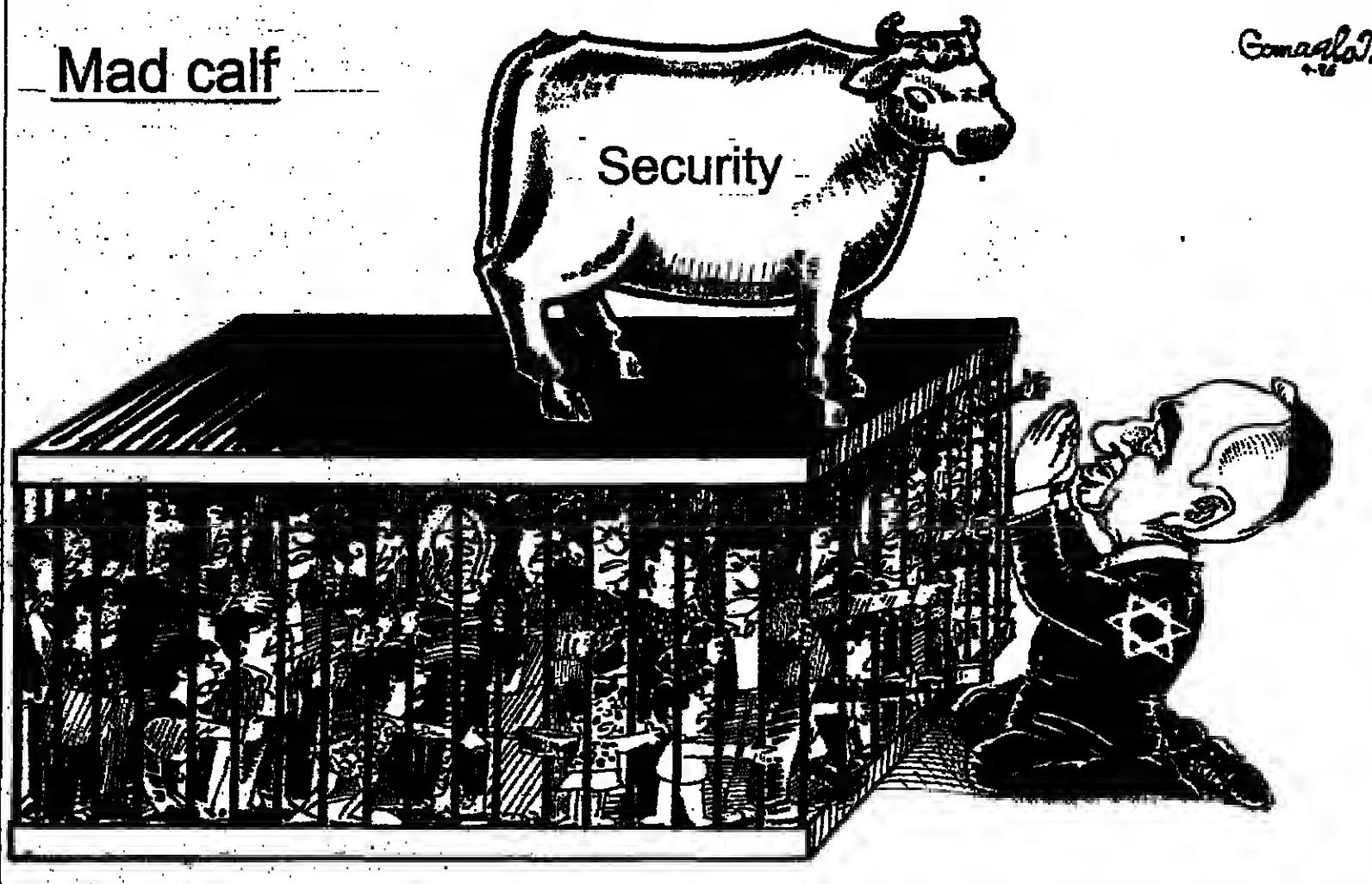
There are, however, other steps that need to be taken. Administrative procedures in some plants can be tightened, so that we can expect (at least in the short term — the next five to fifteen years) for this stretch of land and civilization, the 14.5 million square kilometres spanning Africa and Asia and controlling important strategic junctures in the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and the Arab-Persian Gulf?

This question poses itself more forcefully as the circumstances deteriorate. Over the last two thousand years, at least, in spite of regional variations, an increasing homogeneity evolved, bound by factors of common language, heritage, sense of identity, communal feeling and mutual interests.

This has generated that cultural identity that has been defined and accepted, within the region, among its neighbors and internationally, as the Arabs, Arabism and the Arab world. Even as the Arab world crossed the threshold of the twentieth century, a nascent Arab nationalism crystallised throughout the region in response first to Ottoman colonialism, then to British, French and Italian colonialism. In the wake of World War II, national liberation movements swept across the globe, Israel was created in Palestine, pan-Arab movements, organisations and parties were established in Iraq, Syria and Egypt, and the revolution of 1952 took place. As these changes shook the Arab world, the Arab League emerged as the first regional organisation to bind the countries of the area.

Inspired by the first Arab defeat at the hands of the Zionists in 1948, the tripartite aggression mounted in response to the nationalisation of the Suez Canal in 1956, the war of liberation in Algeria, the struggle to rid the region of the remnants of colonialism, new international alliances and regional configurations, and the quest for economic and social development, Arab nationalists sought to organise the proponents of these modern trends around the necessity of transcending the boundaries of the nation-state to create a larger, more comprehensive national entity, they were divided over the conceptual framework and the means by which to attain it. Differences in opinion gave rise to violent ideological clashes played out in political life, the military and secret intelligence.

Mad calf



Neither deterrent nor last resort

If rumours of the terms of a defence pact between Israel and the US are true, the results for the region will be devastating, writes Ibrahim Nafie



instigating an all-out arms race, with competing parties seeking ever more powerful weapons of mass destruction.

American support for Israel at this sensitive stage in the negotiations will not, as American sources say, provide Israel the reassurance it needs to make further concessions. Rather, the prospect of such a defence pact will compound Israeli intransigence and arrogance, decimating the peace process.

The fact is that Israel already has the unstinting American support it needs, and more, to guarantee its security, if it is security, rather than regional hegemony that Israel seeks. Since 1967 the relationship between the two countries has proceeded along a seemingly inexorable trajectory toward stronger and deeper bonds. Once the US committed itself to guaranteeing Israel's security, it proceeded to commit itself to qualitative Israeli military superiority over all the nations in the region. Israel was able to obtain the most advanced military aerospace technology. During the Reagan administration Israel was able to develop its Arrow missiles. The process was advanced a further step under the Clinton administration with the introduction of the concept of "Israel's potential enemies" — Iran and various terrorist groups. These potential enemies became the reason why Israel was given the most advanced and powerful computers available.

The ambiguous geographical scope of the US-Israeli pact, comprising Israel as defined within its pre-1967 boundaries plus the occupied Arab territories in which Israel claims it must mount operations, indicates America's total disregard for Arab security concerns. Israel's nuclear capacity in particular poses a strategic threat that we cannot afford to ignore.

Israel's possession of nuclear arms cannot be divorced from their potential use, which means the issue of their possession cannot be separated from concerns about the domestic political climate in Israel, a country that boasts a large right-wing, extremist element that could attain power by force or through elections. We have seen indications of the strength of these elements recently in the activities of Jewish

settlers in the West Bank and in the assassination of the former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. That such a political force should have at its hands recourse to nuclear weapons represents a profound threat to the security of the Arab nations.

Arab nations cannot accept the Israeli excuse that its nuclear weapons serve as a deterrent, a last resort that ensures its survival. The only true deterrent is parity between all parties. This alone serves to restrict Israel's nuclear option. Israel's avowed intentions do not constitute a sufficient guarantee for the Arabs. It is impossible for them to determine whether their intentions will remain peaceful, let alone whether the choices will remain in the hands of those who have opted for peace. No nation in the world would reasonably weigh its security on the intentions of others, without seeking its own legitimate means of defence against potential aggression.

Israel already has an enormous traditional military machine, more than capable of guaranteeing its security. Since the establishment of the state of Israel, its military machine has enabled it to attack Arab countries on several occasions, up to and including its invasion of Lebanon and its persistent attacks on Palestinians.

Israel's nuclear capacity constitutes nothing less than the most blatant provocation for the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region. It is capable of unleashing an unprecedented race to acquire weapons of mass destruction, threatening the stability of the entire region and destroying all prospects for peace.

Israel's nuclear capability is neither a deterrent nor a last resort. It has the potential to be used tactically, in low calibre weaponry such as mines and artillery. It can be mobilised in limited combat operations that can be quickly authorised. But more importantly, this nuclear capacity far exceeds any defence needs. According to Fieldman, a well-known Israeli expert at the Centre for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University, Israel needs just 30-40 nuclear warheads to drive all the major Arab countries back to the Middle Ages. Yet, according to the most conservative estimates, Israel possesses

Soapbox

The seeds of terrorism

Recently, the Israeli right sent one of its militants, Yigal Amir, on a mission to assassinate Yitzhak Rabin. Even more recently Hamas sent a score of its own militants on suicide missions to Jerusalem, Ashkelon, and Tel Aviv, killing and maiming nearly 100 Israeli civilians. Both actions have alienated the majority of Arabs and Israelis, and nearly succeeded in derailing the entire peace process.

No amount of summery footwork, however, can salvage the Middle East peace process if Israel continues to embrace state terrorism. Here I am not talking about the clandestine assassination of Fathi Shikaki in Malta, nor of Yehia Ayyash in Gaza. I am referring to the killing of innocent civilians in Southern Lebanon and the demolition of the houses of Palestinian families on the suspicion that some of the inhabitants were Hamas or Jihad militants.

I am referring, too, to the "war of starvation" Israel has launched against the entire population of Palestine. Such collective punishment has never worked in the twentieth century and it will never work with the Palestinians.

Many people around the world, including Arabs, sympathised with Israel when its prime minister was assassinated and when the suicide attacks occurred. But that sympathy is quickly eroding as Israel engages in state-sponsored terrorist acts and collective punishment. We are entering a vicious circle of revenge and counter-revenge. And in the end the victim will be the peace process itself. Stability, development, and democracy — alongside all the peoples of the region — will be held hostage to the vicious circle of terror and fear. Israel must stop its state-terrorism if the vicious circle is to be broken.



This week's Soapbox speaker is professor of Sociology at the AUC and director of the Ibn Khaldoun Centre for Development Studies.

Saadeddin Ibrahim

The rot in the state of the Arabs

Has the idea of a shared Arab civilization become an anachronism? **Lutfi El-Kholi** reviews a recent history of confrontation, and argues that, despite the brief and scattered nature of reconciliations, deeply rooted ties underlie Arab sparring

The Arab League's work to coordinate the joint Arab endeavour was eroded in virtually every domain, as antagonistic ideological, political and military factions carved out various parts of the region for their actors' benefit. Almost simultaneously, clashes emanating from regional disparities in social, economic and political circumstances, and from diverse levels of political consciousness and individual freedoms in different national societies, erupted between the conflicting forces, none of which had the strength or resources to resolve the conflicts in their favour.

Suddenly, it was a case of pan-Arabism versus nation-state nationalism, unity versus separatism, Arabism versus Islam, progressives versus reactionaries, Nasserists versus Baathists, Arab socialism versus scientific socialism, etc. At the same time, the strategic location of the Arab world, its petroleum, the war with Israel and a resurgent anti-Westernism lured the US and the USSR into various forms of direct and indirect intervention in Arab affairs. This generated another clash, lasting from 1956 to 1983; that was ultimately summed up in terms of "American Arabs versus Soviet Arabs" — a regional cold war that, exacerbated by a complex of regional factors related to politics, oil and economics, culminated in the conflagration of the Gulf War. Ironically, while the allied powers that participated in this war managed to draw the curtain on the international cold war, the Arab-Arab cold war is still raging.

Conflict, therefore, has been the prime characteristic governing intra-Arab relations in a region divided within itself, from the collapse of the Egyptian-Syrian Union and the Iraqi-Jordanian Union in the early sixties up to and beyond the Gulf War provoked by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Nevertheless, a political historian would note that there have been various intervals of Arab awakening in which the spirit of Arab unity was revitalised. Examples of this are the resistance to the tripartite aggression in 1956, the Khartoum conference of 1967 (convoiced to try to repair

the damage inflicted in the defeat of the Arab-Israeli war earlier that year) and the October War, in which the military and the oil strategy of the Arab countries were effectively coordinated and mobilised towards a common objective. These intervals, however, were short-lived and quickly superseded by longer stretches of conflict.

Today, we find that the international cold war has ended, the Soviet Union has disintegrated, and socialism has more or less yielded to the call for a market economy. Within the Arab world, efforts to create a larger Arab national entity have failed and political Islam is on the ascent against a background of political violence and terrorism. Every country in the region, regardless of system of government, seeks to strengthen its relations with the US or at least seeks a form of rapprochement. The existence of Israel has come to be generally accepted, particularly by Arab regimes, and a negotiated peace settlement has supplanted all-out confrontation.

Yet, even as inter-Arab conflict persists, the contenders have changed their names. Pro-Americans versus pro-Soviets have been supplanted on one hand by proponents of Arab nationalism, now dubbed the Arab bloc, and on the other by advocates of the new Middle Eastern order; advocates of continued struggle against Israel are pitted against proponents of a political settlement; supporters of a civilian government and a civil society oppose advocates of Islamic government and the Islamisation of society.

This development, significantly, is not restricted to the circles of the ruling order and its social adjuncts, but extends to all political and social organisations, regardless of orientation. The ensuing air of acrimony has virtually incapacitated these organisations. Moreover, it has stifled the objective, clear-headed thinking needed to deal with these issues in a rational and methodological way. Among intellectuals in particular, the debate,

heated as it may be, has become stale and unproductive. Instead of attempting to shed light on different dimensions of the issues at hand, they hurl assorted accusations of treachery, apostasy and ignorance. This is the brighter side. Worse fates can befall, and have befallen, contending parties: prison, violation of human rights, assassination in broad daylight, snatching in front of one's own home and family.

How are we to interpret this phenomenon? Has the life-expectancy of this greater entity known as the Arab world expired? Has its potential been so abused by its people that it has exploded from within? Have they been so inept at managing their legacy of resources and turning them to their collective benefit that the tides of modern change have swept them to the brink of disaster?

Do the various parts of this region really have no common economic and security interests, in spite of an ancient and continuous history of interchange of trade caravans, workers and merchants, and in spite of the extensive history of collective resistance against the Mongols, the Tartars, the Crusaders, the French, British and Italian colonial empires and Israel?

The answer to these questions is a categorical no. In spite of our present circumstances, a panoply of historical and cultural factors have combined to create a single Arab national cultural identity.

True, Arab national consciousness may be more developed and more intensely felt in some quarters of the region than in others. Perhaps the concepts and mechanisms for translating this consciousness into practical reality have not sufficiently matured. But this Arab bloc, and its sense of national identity, is an objective reality at local, regional and international levels. Any calculations regarding tactical or strategic matters take this reality into account. Even if a particular country within the region is at odds with another, in the final analysis, it is considered part of a greater whole.

This said, we must nevertheless recognise that if this air of mutual contention and acrimony persists, it threatens to wreak debilitating, if not terminal, organic damage on the larger Arab edifice. How can we locate the source of the rot and expose it in a courageous and sensible manner? This is indeed our most pressing task as the rush of events propels us onward, toward the 21st century.

Deep and dark

David Blake follows as Verdi lights the way

Requiem Mass, Giuseppe Verdi: the Cairo Choral Society and Jungs Volkensensemble-Hannover, director Klaus-Jürgen Ewald, soloists Retiba El-Hefni (soprano), Awatef El-Sharkawy (alto), Thomas Roache (tenor), Michael Jaekel (bass baritone); conducted by Larry P. Cullin; All Saints' Cathedral, Zamalek; 28 March; Ewart Hall, 29 March

Retiba El-Hefni

These two performances of what might be Verdi's greatest achievement gave Cairo one of the most moving musical experiences of the past six years.

The two concerts differed. The one in All Saints' Cathedral was too heavily charged sonically for the limited space. Not much so, however, the immensity of the Verdi vision hit the roof and bounced back to earth. The tones and performances themselves, always emotionally stirring, did better in the large spaces of the Ewart Hall. There was room for the expansion of the music demands. Never once were the performers under stress or pressure from music, the demands of which are limitless.

What made these two readings so wonderful? The four principal singers seemed deeply and revealingly possessed by the music. The orchestra was always sensitive to what Verdi demands — immense fortissimo and spectral pianissimo, airy speeds and deep dark grandeur. Nothing hurried, everything spread out with spacious amplitude. The chorus's participation was an achievement in itself. The Cairo Choral Society and the Jungs Volkensensemble of Hannover had everything demanded — warmth, passion and shining peaks of higher soprano tone. But over all these virtues was the conductor's understanding of how best to deploy his forces. The *Requiem* is Verdi pure, written in memory of the poet Manzoni's death. Verdi, no sentimentalist, gave it the purest music he ever wrote. It is equal to the 2nd act of *Forza del Destino*. It reaches Mozartian heights of unearthly spirituality and concision. Not a note of the vast building was out of place. It is not an opera, not religious in the extraordinary sense. It is as Verdi asked the *Forza* to be played, "potente singolare e vastissimo, soul not selfless" or as Boito, Verdi's great friend said of the mighty one on his deathbed, "majestic, formidable and silent".

Silent, the *Requiem*! In this per-

formance, yes, because of the correct calm and stills that enabled us to savour and feel the message of the *Requiem* — supplication and help to endure the inferno of life, remembering it is Verdi who wrote this music not a fiddler from the shallows. He never lies or pretends — best to take him or leave him in his own splendour. These beautiful performances took him simply, without a trace of affectation or rhetoric, and the result brought tears.

A look in the concert catalogues shows pages of performances always headed by Toscanini. Strange that his immortal performances of the *Requiem* at Salzburg were a little like the one Larry Cullin achieved at the American University. Simple, unadorned Verdi, note by note, to achieve the overwhelming direct strike at the finish. No big Bill showing off his musical muscles. Verdi knew the world and he knew well what God meant to him and he showed it unadorned. God had His place. Touché. But the church and the academics always found the *Requiem* to be the 5th act of *Aida*. So does the public, the same one who streams into *Tosca*. God can be too. Not Verdi's fault for writing a work whose melodies reach to the heart of the multitude. They hear the notes, the electric shocks of the noise but not the meaning, that real music goes on forever out where the inexplicable spaces stretch. No names, no cars, beyond reality. We were in these regions in Ewart Hall.

The four principal singers entered into the onward momentum of the music. It is a path, a course, a way to the Day of Judgement. Verdi did not at all accept decline. He fought. After the *Requiem* came the fruits of survival, Otello and Falstaff, but the finishing is inevitable.

The pattern of the work is almost divided into two. The number seven is the complete work. The path the sing-

ers take goes more evenly to section 3, the Offertorio, and from then to the end come moral confrontations that are positively Wagnerian. Verdi loved most the baritone voice but it is always to the soprano he turns for catalytic relief.

The two lower voices, Awatef El-Sharkawy, alt, and Michael Jaekel, bass baritone, carried their music proudly. She has the sweetest sounding mezzo. Full, easy at the top, always musical and without the slightest wobble or hoot which afflicts most mezzos. Distinction marked her singing of the melodies, solo or in unison. As with all four singers we had pure music, not noisy declamation. Michael Jaekel had some trouble with the bass part of his voice but the rest came over with great emotion. For once in Verdi the baritone is put behind the tenor but Jaekel in the Dies Irae gave power and El-Sharkawy was richly warm and caring. The prolonged incantation Amen came from chorus and principals with a salutary finality.

And so began the Offertorio. The pause was over and then began the tumult of the ascent to the finish. And here Verdi sets the tenor glowing angelic melodies, probably the finest he ever offered the voice. No strain, no high terrors. Thomas Roache, having no marked Italianate golden flow, could not evoke angels as Bergonzi did but he thought angels passionately and sang the beauties culminating in the Agnus Dei with directness and prophetic vision.

The orchestra under Larry Cullin then began to thread its way with muffled footsteps into the Dantesque depths. Verdi had his doubts about salvation, not about Hell. Hell he knew — Lago, Lady Macbeth, Amneris, so these footsteps into the sulfurous modulations he so loved to terrify us with were given with full tension.

We are at it now. The old genius of the Risorgimento is often accused of misogyny. The Libera Me — the cul-

mination of this epic of supplication for aid against the terror which everyone must face offers the soprano every possibility of cruelest disaster. Verdi floats her to the highest levels of her voice, then abandons her ruthlessly to her exposed destiny. Sopranos fall into but mostly out of the majestic Latin words' dark calamity and misery and cries for help, slip into the depths of a hidden crevasse and are never heard of again except for the shrieks and wobbles that are often the trade voice of the heavy soprano. El-Hefni is no young flower whom everyone will praise for what is to come. El-Hefni has done almost everything possible for her in a long life — except this *Requiem*. She was warned, you are no dramatic soprano, you are lyric and lyrics die before the finishing time in this music. She felt she still had enough strength to make the attempt. She did make it and as these two performances show, she floated into victory.

She is still a soprano who can sopran. No wobbles and screeches, no tipping the high notes. Her light voice was generously given full out and it held to the note. Her chin firm, her mouth well-shaped — tradition and standards told in everything she did. *Walk on, five proud*, so runs the song of the singer who knows her craft. As the Verdi line arched and zoomed ever higher, El-Hefni, like the musical saints, seemed positively happy to be making the challenge.

And this musical radiance was taking place in Cairo regardless of race or creed, a city which knows all the bells except self-doubt. It was good to see El-Hefni transfigured and transfigured — deliver me, free me.

She had taken her part in the final victory of the spirit over all else, a dialogue from the *Giza* whose message is for everyone — if they are capable of hearing it.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Wassan Fahmy & Fathi Ahmed (Paintings)
Ewart Gallery, 23 Zamalek St. Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-5pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 6 April.

George El-Bahgoury (Paintings)
Khan El-Maghrabi Gallery, 18 El-Manasser Mohamed St. Zamalek. Tel 340 3340. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-5pm & 5pm-8.30pm. Until 10 April.

Gratia Sherry (Paintings)
Al-Hayat Gallery, Centre of Arts, 1 El-Masrah St. Zamalek. Tel 340 6211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 5.30pm-9.30pm. Until 10 April.

Somaya Jafri (Antique Furniture)
Near El-Hayat Gallery, 3 Adey St. Adhika St. Dokki. Tel 357 3734. Daily 5pm-9pm. Until 12 April.

Alexandria Artists
El-Hayat Gallery, Opera House Grounds. Giza. Tel 340 6861. Daily 5pm-9pm. 7-13 April.

Mohamed El-Sharkawy (Sculpture) & Nabila El-Sayed (Paintings)
Egyptian Centre for International Cultural Cooperation, 11 Shagaret El-Dar St. Zamalek. Tel 341 3419. Daily 10am-5pm & 4pm-8pm. Until 14 April.

Mohamed Soliman (Paintings)
Al-Ahram Hall, Al-Ahram Building, El-Ghaza St. Tel 345 2725. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 16 April.

Bassem Kharagi (Paintings)
Ewart Gallery, 1 El-Sharif St. Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Fri, 10am-5pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 16 April.

Awad El-Sidani
Mashreq Gallery, 8 Champollion St. Downtown. Tel 378 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-6pm. Until 16 April.

Randa Shakh (Photographs)
Sawy Gallery, AUC, Main Campus, El-Shaikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 4pm-8pm. Until 19 April.

Black and white portraits of outstanding individuals — captured through the photographer's lens over the years.

Mamoun Badawy
Jamaa Centre Hall, Giza Campus, AUC, El-Shaikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 4pm-8pm. Until 20 April.

Photographs under the title The White Desert.

Randa Shakh
Sawy Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, El-Shaikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. 8-30 April.

Paintings by the Lebanese artist.

Images of Egyptian Life Through Travellers' Eyes
Rare Books and Special Collections Library, AUC, El-Shaikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 4pm-8pm. Until 30 April.

Ernest Dawood (Paintings)
Sakana Gallery, 36/4 Al-Hayat St. Tel 346 3242. Daily exc Fri, 10am-5pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 8 May.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafar El-Ahmed St. Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 2.30pm-5pm.

Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mohamed Khalil, including works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Monet and Rodin.

Egyptian Museum
Tel 373 4319. Daily exc Fri, 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.5am & 1pm-5pm. An outstanding collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures and the controversial mummies' room.

Coptic Museum
Tel 362 6766. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm. Founded in 1910, the museum houses the finest and largest collection of Coptic art and artefacts in the world.

Islamic Museum
Part 1, 3, Al-Hayat St. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 2.30pm-5pm. Part 2, 3, Al-Hayat St. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 2.30pm-5pm.

A permanent display of paintings and sculpture during the modern art movement in Egypt, from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners.

Mohamed Nagat Museum
Chateau Pyramide, 9 Mohamed Al-Ghadi St. Giza. A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagat (1888-1956).

Mohamed Nagat Museum
Tel 373 4319. Daily exc Fri, 9am-11am & 1pm-3pm. A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mohamed Nagat (d. 1956).

From the Damour Cultural Palace.

Revised by Nagwa El-Ahadi

FILMS

This is Noriko
Japanese Information and Cultural Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St. Giza. Tel 340 6861. Daily 4pm, 6pm, 8pm.

Directed by Youssef Moustafa
(1981), the film depicts a handicapped girl who, deserted by her father, strives towards a successful professional life.

Schwester (Sister)
Goshe Institute, 3 Abdel-Salam St. Downtown. Tel 373 9677. 10 April, 6.30pm. Directed by Margaretha on 'Trotta' (1975).

Chemical change their programmes every Monday. The information provided to world through to Sunday of our which it is wise to check with the cinema.

El-Nasr Film (Sound Adapt)
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St. Downtown. Tel 373 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Romy, Romy St. Helopolis. Tel 238 6344. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 8pm, 9pm. Cinema 12, El-Masrah St. Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Nasr Film, 17 El-Nasr St. Downtown. Tel 934 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. St. Mohammed. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm.

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The past, paint and people

Nigel Ryan speaks to Gazbia Sirry, the subject of a major retrospective at the Centre of Arts

Gazbia Sirry is short. Maybe she is less than five feet tall. As she walks around her current retrospective, which occupies the basement galleries of the Centre of Arts, Zamalek, you suddenly realise that she is shorter than many of the paintings on display.

Gazbia Sirry is also 70. She likes flowers and she likes angling. These may seem extraneous details but they are as surprising as her size. You look at her, you look at her most recent paintings, and it is difficult to believe that she is really three score years and ten. She does not look like a pensioner. But then neither does she paint like a pensioner. Gazbia Sirry is something of a phenomenon. She has a way of subverting conventional chronologies.

She was born in the twenties, into a past that was another country, at least in so far as Gazbia tells it. One grandfather was Turkish, her grandmother Greek. The family was mixed — Muslim, Coptic, Egyptian, Turkish, Orthodox — thriving during the period that followed the 1919 Revolution. On the wall of her sitting room is a huge, circular cloth, embroidered in gold, behind glass in a circular frame. Her grandmother brought it from Turkey. "In the old days people wrapped their clothes in these cloths," she explains. I compliment her on the object and she thanks me. And then she says that she always knew that she wanted to be an artist.

"We lived in the old city, beyond Sayeda Zeinab, in my grandmother's house. And one of the first things I remember is being awake at night, in this old, gloomy house, and there being a procession, a *moulid* outside, and the light of the hand-held torches threw the shadows of the *mashrabiyas* windows against the wall, and it was all rather frightening."

She relishes the recollection, and you know that you are being invited to speculate on the strangeness of the fact that this diminutive, energetic woman should ever have been timid. But such timidity did not last for long. By the time they had moved to Manial, Gazbia was, in her own words, "crazy". Her sisters were beautiful and demure and she was the wild one. In the summer the family would move to Fayoum, where they owned land, and she would spend two months running about the countryside, free from the restrictions of an indoor, metropolitan life.

"The city was different then. Now it is like an apartment that used to house two people but that has been subdivided to house 60. It is chaos, and before it was beautiful. I do not dwell, though, on its ugly aspects. I just carry on working."

It is her work to which she is devoted. She paints every day. And the result of this devotion fills several galleries at the Centre of Arts. She is pleased that the paintings are all hers.

"I haven't borrowed a thing for this show. They are all paintings that I have kept."

Not that selling should be a problem for Gazbia Sirry. She is well and truly established, ensconced at the tip of contemporary production. She is not just a name but a history. More than 40 years ago, in 1954, she won the Rome Prize. In 1956 she was commended at the Venice Biennale. Awards have come her way regularly, and several of them adorn the walls of her studio. She is the subject of television documentaries, of newspaper profiles, of books published by the General Organisation for Information. And she is obviously, uncomplicatedly pleased with all of this.

Walking around exhibitions with the responsible artist is seldom a relaxing affair. Gazbia Sirry, however, makes it easy. She has a spiel and she knows it by heart. The forties were a time of training, when she was studying for her Fine Arts Diploma at the Higher Institute of Art Education for Women, in Boulak Abu El-Ela. "I included some drawings from my student days, from life classes, to show that I can draw. Some people think I can't." And she smiles at the ridiculousness of the thought.

By 1949, roughly the time of the first self-portrait in the show, she received her Diploma in Art Education. In 1951 she was in Paris, studying with Marcel Gromaire. A year later she was in Rome, and then, by the mid-fifties in London, on a two-year scholarship to study graphics at the Slade.

The current retrospective includes pieces from every stage of her career. Alongside the figure studies from her student days — pencil drawings from life classes — is a strange little drawing of her head on wheels, hair Medusa-like, facing the spectator as it is carried away along a track that swirls into space. "But I was never a surrealist."

There is a portrait of the Irish girl, "very tall, very beautiful", in a black polo neck jumper. There are pictures from the fifties, black outlines with flat patches of colour applied in decorative designs. *The Song of the Revolution* (1952) shows two women at a piano. It is a tricky title which seems little more than a post-event rationalisation.

It is these pictures, decorative formulas, thinly painted, peasant women in traditional dress, that earned Gazbia Sirry the reputation of a socially committed artist. But this is the nearest accident of chronology that has not stood the test of time. By far the most convincing paintings from this period are the ones in which the artist knows the subject. The titles are sly — *A Seated Girl*, *A Girl on a Sofa* — but behind the anonymity of such titles are intense and passionate portraits of friends. And again there is a self-portrait, though it is disguised. *The Teacher* receives flowers from her students. And as we walk past Gazbia nods in the direction of the canvas and announces with a smile: "Of course,

you know, I used to teach."

Indeed she did. She was professor of painting at Helwan University, and for a year she also taught at the American University in Cairo. But then in 1981 she resigned both posts. It is no coincidence that her resignation came after the Ministry of Education banned life classes in art schools. "Now," she says, "they make installations in multi-media, a bit here, a bit there, but they cannot draw."

There were other reasons, too, why she gave up her teaching commitments. The classes were crowded. She felt many of her students were not serious about what they were doing. And she wanted to concentrate on her own painting.

About her art Gazbia Sirry has no qualms. "I didn't paint to become famous. I didn't paint to become rich. I painted because that is what I know how to do."

And how does she feel when she looks back at her old works?

She likes them.

Once upon a time Gazbia Sirry worked with young weavers in the village of Hammamiya. It is an experience that may well have informed the subjects of her paintings at the time. Much later, in 1990, when the new Opera House was built, she entered the competition to design a tapestry for the building. "I won." The winning pleases her. But she adds a coda. "I entered anonymously. I was not pulling weight."

Gazbia Sirry is certainly aware of the position she holds in the Egyptian art scene. She is, to use a quaint but much bandied phrase, a leading Egyptian painter. The term is, of course, meaningless, except inasmuch as it denotes that she is Egyptian, and well known. But what does she think about the Egyptian component of her art?

"I try to be authentic."

The answer is as meaningless as the question. It is not a path worth pursuing. But it was in the fifties when, if you listen to what people say about the period, everyone, it seemed, was walking with baited breath for the emergence of a national school.

"We were serious people, and we took our work seriously."

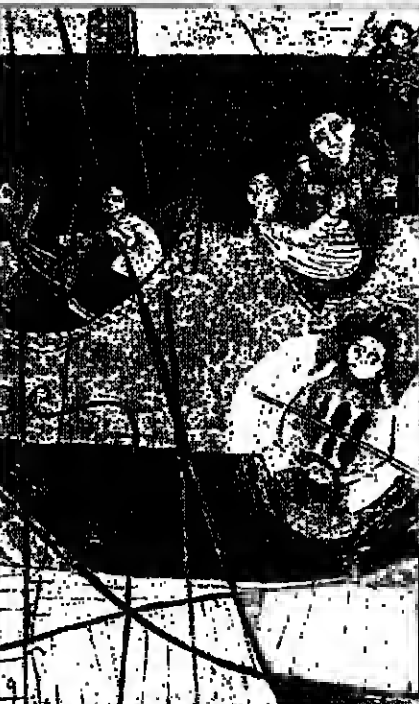
But did a national school emerge, or was all the hype misplaced?

"It was a different time." And with that Gazbia Sirry ends one line of inquiry. The subject is closed.

She makes a telling remark. She won a prize at the Venice Biennale in 1956, but that was the time of the tripartite aggression, and so her success did not receive any attention in the Egyptian press. Bigger events took over, much as they always have. It is the revolution that has tinted the way her works of the fifties are viewed. And it was the defeat of 1967 that informs her own unravelling of the iconography of works produced at that time.

There is a progression, though, that is not an accident of history. In the fifties she confesses to being concerned about developing a strategy to get away from the flatness of her paintings. She confided her concern to an art critic. He told her it was her own problem, which can hardly have been reassuring, though it was undoubtedly true.

First the outlines went. Colour spilled over into the background. The flat forms began to disintegrate — a process that by 1956 had resulted in canvases such as *The Swings*, a painting that is, unfortunately, not included in the exhibition. By the time she had completed the houses series that mark the late sixties she had adopted a sort of analytic cubism, becoming in-



"People are for painting": Gazbia Sirry, self portrait, above; *The Swings* of 1956 (not included in the current retrospective exhibition), and details of two other works from the Centre of Arts

around with the facility that comes from a lifetime acquaintance, constitute the culmination of her love affair with paint.

Her art no longer occupies the public arena in the sense it once did. The city, anyway, is dirty and noisy and overcrowded. The revolution was more than four decades ago and people are sadder than they were. The prizes have been won, framed, and are on the walls. The national school never emerged. Life classes have been banned. Religion is being vulgarised. Time passes and you get older. We all have strategies to cope. Gazbia Sirry's is to acknowledge her painting as nothing less — or more — than a vocation.

And invariably the vehicle for her vocation, the object she describes in the paint she loves, is the human figure. The preponderance of self-portraits that regularly dot this exhibition, detailing an obsession with the image of herself as artist, have given way to a comfortable acceptance of the role she has chosen. Her choices now are purely personal, the subjects entirely her own. She has taken refuge in the things she knows. She loves flowers, and so she paints flowers. But often these flowers turn into people. It is not a humanist conceit. It is simply that she is a product of her age. Born six years after a liberal revolution; pinning her hopes, at one time, on another revolution that happened in her twenties. She knows that people are for painting.

Times have certainly changed. Gazbia Sirry's anecdotes are littered with people who have disappeared. Milo, the Russian Jew, who kept a studio near the Citadel, and who "cried and cried and cried when finally he left Egypt". Esther, a portrait of whom — spontaneous, unlaboured, comfortable — dominates one of the rooms in the current show. As a child Gazbia Sirry sat in Gropius, taken as a treat by a family friend who would show her catalogues from the great European museums. His own children were uninterested, she was out. As a young woman her mother covered for her, telling her family that she was studying home economics when she was in fact enrolled in art classes. She travelled, unaccompanied, throughout Upper Egypt. She sat in cafés and she went to parties. These are simple things. But could a young girl do the same things now? She shakes her head. "Times are different."

"At that time, too, we had good critics, serious people, foreign writers and Egyptians. But now there is no one. Who writes about art? I get a phone call from a critic, and she calls at all the wrong times, when I am at my exhibition, or in the afternoon, when the gallery is closed, and I take my nap. And my husband says she is at her exhibition, or she is asleep, but will go back to her exhibition in the evening. And all this critic wants are some prints of my pictures. She wants to write about my show but she will not go to see it." She looks exasperated. It is late. "What can I do?" She shrugs her shoulders.

And you know precisely what she will do. She will go and paint some more.

Gazbia Sirry, *Time and Place*, a retrospective exhibition, continues until 10 April. For full details, see Listings

Plain Talk

An expression that was common among us in the old days was *Awlad El-Hetta* or "boys of the district". That expression was a reflection of a feeling of solidarity and camaraderie among the young men of the district and included a sense of pride for the dozen or so streets which comprised our "heta".

Our awareness of a sense of community found expression in having our own football teams which practiced and played in an open space, and in organizing matches with other districts' teams. Our own theatrical troupe gave performances varying from *Nagib El-Rihany* to *Shakespeare* in Arabic. We also had our music ensemble which often played, free of charge, in local weddings. The feeling of solidarity was reflected in the fundraising activities that took place on the eve of funerals and weddings. We even ventured to produce a newsletter about important events in our district.

I was reminded of this sense of belonging to a community when I received two magazines bearing the name of Heliopolis. One, in English, is published by the Heliopolis Community Association and has Hamida Mousa as editor-in-chief. The other, in Arabic, is published by the Society for Service Development of Heliopolis, and is presided over by Mrs Suzanne Mubarak.

The society held its 15th General Meeting last Sunday. It would be difficult, indeed impossible, to speak at length about all the society's achievements. Suffice it to give some landmarks. The Heliopolis Library has become a mecca for the district's inhabitants with its most up-to-date equipment and its section for children's books. The library has a number of activities, including a cine club, lectures and seminars, competitions and puppet shows for children.

The latest addition to the society's achievements is the Children's Museum. The idea of the museum was born in 1987 and since then, and due to the indefatigable efforts of Mrs Mubarak together with a group of experts, the museum is now ready for inauguration.

The museum contains sections on Egypt, nature, history, civilisation, the environment, arts and sciences. The idea behind the museum is, in the words of the report, "to create a state of interaction between the child and the human, the environment and nature, through an exploratory voyage during which the child himself seeks to recognise these elements".

Surrounding the museum are 17 acres of flowers, plants and trees, each identified by signs displaying their names to acquaint the child with the wonders of nature.

One of the worthy activities of the society concerns beautifying Heliopolis and enriching the aesthetic awareness of its inhabitants. The activities in this field reflect a highly civilised attitude, which aims at adding an element of beauty to the district. For example, a rigid control is now imposed on the advertisement boards and authorisation for advertisements will be subject to certain restrictions. A new project is also underway for improving the highway to the airport by the Airport Authority and the Department of Civil Aviation.

Walking or driving through the streets of Heliopolis, one is impressed by the care given to the trees and the green patches on both sides and the middle of roads. A regulated system of tree irrigation has been introduced, and a uniformity of trees has been imposed. A number of gardens and parks have been created notably the International Park, which is a pleasure to visit.

I may sound over enthusiastic about the society's activities. This is hardly surprising given that I am a member of the community of Heliopolis.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Books

Shadows cast on freedom

Fathi Ghanem takes as the point of his departure a Ph.D. thesis by Marina Stagh entitled *The Limits of Freedom of Literary Discourse in Egypt in the Eras of Abdel-Nasser and Sadat*, published by the University of Stockholm. In her thesis, Stagh discusses the crisis of expression and freedom of speech from the coming to power of the Free Officers in 1952 to the assassination of Sadat in 1981.

Reading Stagh's work, Ghanem declares, prompted this volume of reflections on the years since his graduation from the Faculty of Law in the early '50s, years that included his appointment to the editorial board of *Al-Ahram* and the publication of several volumes of novels and short stories.

There is no doubt that Ghanem is a credible witness to a 30-year era of events that were to prove crucial on many levels. What lends his testimony significance, however, is the fact that he was appointed to many key-positions that brought him in close contact with decision-makers. Among the many posts held by Ghanem was the chairmanship of the board of the Middle East News Agency, the chairmanship of the board of Dar Al-Tahrir and the editorship of *Al-Gumhuria*. Later, he was co-editor, with Salah Hafez, of *Rose*

El-Youssef. Their tenure was to mark the weekly's golden era which started in the early '70s and ended abruptly in 1977 with Sadat's decision to dismiss the two editors, largely because of the stance adopted by the magazine towards the bread riots of January 1977.

It is such experiences that Ghanem draws upon in his investigation of the parameters proscribed by the Nasser and Sadat regimes on freedom of expression, and the limits of the relationship between the two regimes and the intelligentsia. Although the two presidents adopted different approaches towards writers and journalists, they were both keen to control the literary scene, and by extension, the awareness of Egyptians.

Careful to acknowledge the achievements and victories of the army after the revolution, Ghanem ponders at length the exorbitant toll taken on these other fronts.

The new regime annulled the multi-party system and parliament. Likewise, newspapers came under the authority and censorship of the state which chose editors-in-chief and members of the board of media institutions as well as exercising censorship through the ministries of culture and information and through the intervention of the military and various security outfits. Ghanem contrasts the depletion of the literary and journalistic output after the revolution with the plethora of publications before the revolution. Only 10 months before the revolution, Cairo alone produced 21 dailies, 121 weekly magazines and 172 periodicals. But once in power the revolutionary regime wasted little time in curbing freedoms of expression. As Nasser was achieving one victory after the other and cutting the profile of liberation leader, a ferocious attack was launched against parties and university professors. Al-Sanhouri Pa-

Ma'raka Bayn Al-Dawla Wa Al-Muthaqafin ("The Battle Between the State and the Intelligentsia"), Fathi Ghanem, Cairo: Kitab Al-Yawm, 1995

sha, head of the State Council, was beaten in his office, the bar association and journalists' syndicates were dissolved, newspapers were closed. Ghanem's account of this period is invaluable. He provides an eye-witness account of such turning points as the nationalisation of newspapers in 1960, the sequestrations and the passing of socialist laws, and the defeat of 1967 which unmasked the truth about a system that had ruthlessly silenced critics and gagged the media.

The nationalisation of the media was followed by a relentless process of taming journalists and writers through imprisonment and banning from print opposition figures, while rewarding the compliant with posts and privileges. It is a system, explains Ghanem, that preferred yes-men to experts. Ghanem concludes that ultimately, the security forces

in their many departments, and *Al-tawseem al-taleef*, came to have full sway over public opinion. Likewise, Sadat marked the beginning of his reign with the fierce attack on *marabik al-quwa*. He was intent on adopting his predecessor's stand towards freedom of speech vis-a-vis security. Fundamentalism and the proliferation of terrorist groups, comments Ghanem, is the natural product of this atmosphere of suppression and the direct outcome of a strategy that pitted one force against another. Sadat, in giving full reign to Islamist groups in order to overcome leftists and Nasserists, unwittingly lent support to the very figures who, a few years later, turned against and assassinated him. Ghanem goes on to register various phenomena in the current status quo that has grown out of this system. Among them is the debasement of values evoked in an anecdote about a university professor employed at a

Saudi Arabian university who, in an attempt to gain favour, demanded that a course on Ancient Egyptian civilisation be cancelled. No less noteworthy is the phenomenon of media and literary figures who have become no more than mouthpieces of the regime.

Ghanem concludes that the only way out of the current impasse is for intellectuals to honestly review their own record in the light of a security strategy that became obsolete years ago, and that, by subjugating culture to security created a gap in which pernicious forces came to the fore. The testimony of the author in this book complements earlier testimonies offered in fictional form. In novels such as *Zeinab Wa Al-Arsh* (Zeinab and the Throne), *Al-Raghl Al-Lazi Faqad Zilahu* (The Man Who Lost His Shadow) and *Tilk Al-Ayazam* (Those Days), Ghanem examines the machinations of the Nasser and Sadat regimes. This volume offers a more polemical approach, by a man who, for over thirty years, was involved and implicated in these crucial events, a man who does not shirk responsibility for the way things fell out.

Reviewed by Mahmoud El-Wardani



photo: Antoine Albert

I didn't promise you a rose garden

Past the grotto, greenery and shaded benches, Fayza Hassan finds her way to the Fish Garden's annual decorative plants and flowers exhibition

The Fish Garden occupies a special place in my heart since it is here that I first learned to walk, going up and down the little hill that leads to the grotto. Those were the days when people had time for public gardens and teaching children the names of trees. I am ashamed to confess that in all these years during which I practised the art so painstakingly learned there, I have never paid a visit to the Fish Garden. A glance and a promise is all I accorded it on my way to Zamalek.

This is why, on this rainy morning, I discovered that the main entrance had been displaced and no one had bothered to tell me. This displeased me immensely. One likes to believe that things don't change and will be found at the same place when needed. Anyway, this variation to my recollections spoiled my first impression and I was spitefully satisfied upon noticing that the silvery trunks of the royal palms had faded to a dull grey and that the once superb ponds were now mangy. Then, I saw the bombax trees towering over the garden, one with red flowers, the other with rieh yellow ones. I did not remember them from my childhood and they were positively superb. They more than made up for the slightly neglected aspect of the garden and consoled me as I entered through the "wrong" door, on the Nile side.

This side of the garden, at present, houses the annual exhibition of decorative plants and greenery organised by the Ministry of Agriculture. "This is the third year that we use this setting," says Ashraf Foda, head of the Decorative Plants Department at the Ministry of Agriculture. Three years ago, the Orman Garden, "or any garden under the supervision of the ministry," says Foda, was used for these annual exhibitions.

A cluster of hot-houses contains the plants that flourish under controlled artificial light. They gleam with drops of water, sprayed every half an hour. It is awfully hot under the white tents; a welcomed change from the bad weather outside. The prominent yucca steal the show from succulents of all forms and sizes. The latter do particularly well in Egypt and the variety is endless, with many sporting a single arrogant colourful flower. Perennials seem to be the specialty of the two schools of agriculture — in Giza and Shariya — as well as the ministry's nurseries. Foda confirms this impression: "Perennials are outdoor plants, they are easy to grow, sturdy and very cheap. Beginners do very well with perennials." The private sector has more opportunity to experiment, especially with imported strains that cover the gamut, from imported grass seeds grown in easy-to-handle "tiles" to expensive tulips. All growers claim that the plants do well in less controlled environments. One particular grower has pictures of a special hot-house in El-Qanater where they "season" the imported seeds. Signs of wear-and-tear, however, are clearly visible on some geraniums.

"They were glorious last week," says Foda defensively. "You should have come the first day!" I can't help but wonder about the way the geraniums will look on the balconies of their owners in two months time. Never mind, geraniums are cheap and readily available anyway, and may be they only flourish on Dutch window sills. "This particular grower exports all his geraniums to Holland," Foda says. "They never have enough! I hope that the ones on show here are just the rejects."

Other growers have been experimenting with bonsai; some of the samples on display are a little overgrown perhaps, but nevertheless quite decorative.

Many amateur gardeners come every day leaving with armfuls of plants. The more ambitious have hired small trucks. "It is like the book fair," says Mona who has just spent more than LE400 on two Vietnamese potted palms. "I keep coming back to make sure I have not missed on anything." Do these plants do well? I want to know. "No better or worse than any others bought in a nursery," she admits, but with a much wider choice and the best bougainvilleas. "Mine are doing great in Agami," says Mona. "I bought two, years ago."

It is not only a place where the rich can indulge their hobby, says Foda. A lot of the plants go for PT50 and now everyone wants plants in their houses, shops and workshops. Foda tells me of his mechanic who has been growing dwarf palm trees in his garage, taking them out several times a day to bask in the sun. "We have come a long way," he says. "In 1982 very few middle class Egyptians even thought about buying a plant. Now they buy seeds and experiment." There are a couple of sheds on the grounds that specialise in garden tools, fertilisers, seeds, and miracle growing powders that seem to be among the most popular gathering spots.

On my way out I hear a little boy shouting excitedly: "I found it, this is the one." He waves a tiny pot of violets under his mother's nose, obviously ready to throw a tantrum if she does not comply with his desire. This beats children hollering for chipies, any day.



Pot Pourri

Where are the batons?

Crossing busy streets in downtown Cairo is no longer a topic of conversation. People do not like to mention incurable diseases. Only those harbouring a secret death wish can take this kind of exercise in their stride. It has stopped the stuff from which clever boys' mocs can be derived.

A new characteristic of our demonic traffic worth mentioning, however, is the tender age of the new generation of traffic policemen and their total bewilderment at the circulation flow. At one particular crossroads I have seen one of these young boys waving both his hands in different directions, authoritatively urging motorists to proceed on a head-on collision course. Many drivers have now developed the alarming habit of using their own judgement in the absence of clear indications on how to proceed when confronted with red lights. Ubiquitous pedestrians no longer wait for any particular sign that would hinder or facilitate their passage. Rather, they prefer to plunge ahead regardless. Gone are the days where older traffic policemen would smartly wave their batons, stopping the oncoming traffic to allow a part little thing to mance her way safely to the other side. The young generation is insensitive to female helplessness, and fewer and fewer carry those nice white batons once considered the symbol of power. While traffic policemen themselves have proliferated, the batons have not, and baton-less young boys, understandably, can only fight a losing battle against huge, smoking red buses.

Having to negotiate one particularly busy crossing five times a week, I have become personally acquainted with one such incapacitated representative of the new traffic order. The little fellow seems to be in his teens. Had he been out of uniform I would have sworn that he was a young lad fresh out of the country, who had not had time to master the dangerous business of moving about the city.

A typical daily scenario involves my standing on one side of the street and him on the other. I stare at him over the tops of the cars. He pretends not to see me. Some days I could swear he is singing or talking to himself. A couple of red buses brush me back onto the narrow footpath. I start waving frantically and try to call him over the din to remind him that he is here for a purpose, that of helping me across — all this to no avail. Well, not quite: sometimes an older gentleman will offer his good services, leading me by the hand like the scouts do in Europe when they assist the blind and old ladies in distress. Occasionally a motorist (also an older gentleman: women and young men have no time for niceties — they stare well above pedestrians' heads in a successful attempt to convey the message that we don't really exist) will stop just long enough for me to reach the middle of the road, where I dangerously weave my way between cars, waiting for the split second provided by a change of gears to propel myself to relative safety.

And where is my young policeman during this time? He has taken advantage of my own manoeuvre to cross in the opposite direction. He now stands where I was stranded not five seconds ago, looking as lost as ever. Usually exhausted by the emotions of my brush with death, I proceed on my way with no more than a few words of abuse in the direction of the law enforcer.

A few days ago, however, the ordeal having frayed my nerves more than usual, I felt the instincts of the jungle well up to the surface. Turning around, I jumped right in front of one of those nasty microbuses launched on its usual murderous course. It screeched to a halt and the driver spat at me then proceeded to almost run me over. Screaming, I found myself propelled right on top of the little policeman, who gave me a startled look. I shook his arm violently. "What are you doing here if you are not directing the traffic?" I hissed. He looked confused, then vaguely pointed his hand at the oncoming vehicles as if the mere acknowledgement of the pandemonium reigning at this particular point was reason enough for his spaced-out attitude. "Too many cars," he said finally in a strong Sa'idi accent. "So," I demanded furiously, "what about the pedestrian crossing, aren't you here to enforce the law? This," I said slowly, pointing to the faded white lines, "is to allow people to cross safely to the other side."

Obviously he had not been told and had been unable to work it out for himself, because he just laughed. In all honesty, the white lines were hardly visible, but still. I led him firmly by the arm and pointed. "Nobody pays any attention," he said, "they don't care, they are all mad." I imagined he was missing his little village but I had no intention of letting compassion get in the way of order. "Go stand in the middle of the road," I instructed. "Stop the traffic. I want to cross." He looked at me incredulously. "I can't do that," he said sheepishly. "I'm afraid of the big buses." Suddenly he recovered his composure and extracted a rumpled notebook from his back pocket. "I am not here to direct the traffic, I am a parking policeman," he declared with as much dignity as he could muster, whereupon he moved away, leaving me to the dangerous business of seeing myself across for the third time that day. Only when I was safely on the other side once more did I remember that I had never seen one of those little white stickers gracing any of the windows of the dozens of cars illegally parked on this particular street.

Fayza Hassan

Trading places, together

Through a unique exchange programme, Egyptian and Canadian youth dispel pre-conceptions, even about their own cultures, writes Gihan Shahine



Fun and games across the nations

photo: Sami Bushra

Graham Wan, a 19-year-old high school graduate from rural Canada, is suddenly that he must soon leave his surrogate family. The modestly furnished apartment where Graham has lived for nearly four months with an Egyptian host family in Ismailia, "will always linger in my memory," he says. Graham is fascinated by Egyptian culture and has tried his best to integrate into the society, even in small ways: he's taken to *galabiyas* and has eaten his share of *koshari*. Graham also took part in most of the religious and social rituals of Ramadan: he occasionally fasted, joined in the family *iftar*, observed their prayers, and helped make *kahk* (sugar-coated biscuits) for the *Eid al-fitr* (feast which marks the end of Ramadan).

Melting two different cultures into one pot has been the main objective of the Canadian-Egyptian Youth Exchange Programme for the past three years. Organised by the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports in cooperation with the Canadian Youth Council, the programme is not the first of its kind, but it is unique: participants not only learn about cultures in their adopted country, they also discover new societies back home.

Unlike other exchange programmes that generally last between 10 and 14 days, this one spans seven months. Each student has a counterpart, and half their time is spent together in Canada and the other half in Egypt, with host families who are unrelated to the participants.

While most of the Egyptian participants come from Cairo or Alexandria, says Fawzi Akl, under-secretary of state and Egypt's supervisor of the programme, the council chooses host families from Ismailia and Port-Said — cities where people have long been exposed to foreigners who have navigated through the Suez Canal. Tanta was also chosen for its unique mixture of urban and rural cultures, which gives the programme's participants a broader view of life in Egypt.

The length of the programme also gives them the chance "to work interculturally, to learn communication skills, to become exposed to a different culture, and to learn respect for another set of values, without passing judgement," explains Darren Brown, Canada's coordinator for the programme.

And there are misconceptions about Egyptian society that the Canadian participants acquire back home. "We only study Pharaonic civilization in history books at school and do not learn anything about contemporary Egyptian society," says Brown.

No doubt this nurtures people's imaginations: Egyptians are seen as nomadic desert wanderers, for example. "For Egypt as a religiously backward society," says Brown. "Such views might arise from biased media coverage, which tends to focus on negative issues like terrorism — to attract readership." The programme, meanwhile, gives participants a first-hand look at Egypt's modern civilisation.

It also includes full-time volunteer

work at social service organisations like hospitals, orphanages and centres for the disabled. Participants observe community development in Canada and learn how the contemporary Egyptian social structure operates.

At a rehabilitation centre in Ismailia, Egyptian and Canadian volunteers are busy helping disabled people cut paper to make notebooks. "My work here taught me that the disabled can greatly contribute to community development," a Canadian participant says. "I also learnt how to appreciate teamwork." And the work also inspired his Egyptian counterpart to mount a similar project.

Small business development involving a range of approaches — both traditional and non-traditional — is one of the programme objectives recently added on by Fawzi Akl. He hopes to help unemployed youth launch such business-chaity projects at a very low cost.

Akl has also developed political and economic objectives for the programme. He boasts that through the Egyptian council, programme participants were given the opportunity to meet with ministers, attend an open forum at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies and take part in parliamentary discussions. And a number of participants have, in fact, conducted comparative studies of the social, economic and political conditions in the two countries.

Jennifer Brammer, a 19-year-old Canadian who plans to take gender studies

in college, is surprised at the wide discrepancy between the Canadian image of the status of women in Egypt and in Islam, on the one hand, and the reality on the other.

"Having met women here in Egypt, I have developed an image of their status [that extends] far beyond what I could acquire from books and newspapers in Canada," Brammer says. "Take the issue of the *hijab* (veil). In Canada, many people think that women in Egypt are covered in black from head to toe, and that, therefore, they are subject to male oppression."

What Jennifer saw were women who fit that image, "but I have also seen others who are not veiled, or are veiled in a completely different way," she says. "Now I both understand and respect the true logic behind the veil."

While Brammer is satisfied with these initial observations of Egyptian society, another Canadian participant, Pascale Fournier, and her 23-year-old Egyptian counterpart, Rania Gomaa, have gone on a more professional mission.

They conducted comparative research on the different types of discrimination faced by women in both countries and found that in Canada women receive lower salaries than their male peers, "a discriminatory attitude that does not necessarily exist in Egypt," they write. "But Canadian society shows much more respect for women, especially in regard to their way of thinking and their personal skills," concludes Gomaa.

According to many, the programme has given Egyptian youth a unique chance to observe other cultures, to think independently and to draw their own conclusions. "We gained fluency in the English language and tried to take what is best from the two cultures," says Rehab Assad, a 23-year-old graduate of the College of Pharmacy, who feels that the programme helped develop her character. "More importantly, the programme exposed me to sub-cultures within my own country."

This opportunity, however, is still limited to a selected few. Only 21 young men and women, ranging from age 16 to 24, and spanning all social classes, are selected from each country every year, according to their education, language proficiency and interpersonal skills.

This rule is rigidly applied in Canada, but participants from Egypt are required to be university graduates from urban centres like Cairo and Alexandria. This year, however, a few participants came from Port Said.

Although Canadian participants and supervisors criticise this Egyptian criteria, Akl believes it is perfect when considering the Egyptian educational system, the time span of the programme and the comparably short three or four month summer vacations.

"College undergraduates would not postpone their studies to join the programme, so the post-graduate period is the best time for them to do so," explains Akl.

Sufra Dayma

Sambousek

Ingredients: (The dough)

- 1 cup white flour
- 1 tsp butter ghee
- 1 tsp corn oil
- Corn or sunflower oil for frying
- A pinch of salt

The Filling:

1/4 kilo red minced meat cooked the usual way with chopped onions and butter, then add *summa*, salt, pepper, allspice and a pinch of ground nutmeg. After removing the meat from heat, mash a whole boiled egg and add a bunch of finely chopped parsley leaves to it, stir and mix all ingredients well and cover until it cools off.

Method: (The dough)

Mix the flour with the ghee and oil, add the salt and work them all together between the tips of your fingers. When they are mixed well, slowly add the warm water, quantity depending upon how well the dough mixes. It should not be sticky. By means of a dough roller, flatten the dough, then fold it back into squared layers and leave it covered in the fridge to rest for at least 2 hours. Flatten it again then cut it into round patties by means of the edge of a drinking glass, then fill each patty in the middle and fold the edges together forming half a circle. Deep fry them in very hot oil and remove on kitchen blotting paper.

You can use feta cheese mixed with ground dry mint and a yoke of a boiled egg as another kind of filling.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

The spirit of place

Nigel Ryan joins cafe society

How can one review the Elite in Alexandria? In terms of the food served? Well, the food at the Elite is moderately good, though one could never claim it is anything more. One could write about its proprietor, Madame Christina, but she has been the subject of a great many columns inches already. There is no need for me to add to them. One could write about the interior — the painted ceilings, the large Matisse cut out on the wall, portraits of Cavafy here, there and everywhere. Yet none of this would do justice to the place. The Elite just is.

Restaurants cannot be reduced to formulas — just think of those tacky themed establishments that appear to be sprouting up everywhere. If things were this easy everyone would be a successful restaurateur. But restaurants are about more than this. They are about more than making lots of money. Indeed, I have a sneaking suspicion that the very best restaurants really just break even. Successful restaurateurs are all quite mad. It would not be overstating the case that they do what they do because they love doing it.

The Elite began life as a restaurant and sidewalk cafe. In the good old days there was also a nightclub upstairs, though this closed down sometime in the mid-seventies. The sidewalk section was long ago glassed in, creating a triangular shape that feels like the prow of a ship. Here one can sit for hours, watching the crowds pass by along Safiya Zaghloul Street. You will not be disturbed by the waiters, even if you spend several hours over a single cup of

coffee. This is one part of the successful formula. The waiters are another constant fixture. Faces do not change, another important element in Madame Christina's success. In fact, the Elite operates as a kind of club. And the customers remain as loyal as the staff.

But this being a restaurant review it is to the food I must turn. The menu is a predictable affair, offering the usual, standard fare. It is hardly inspired, but then neither is the cooking. I ordered calamari, which arrived in halves, battered and fried, together with a handful of french fries. Everything was passable, though it would be overstating the case to say it was anything other than pedestrian. My lunch companion ordered cannelloni, pancakes stuffed with meat and tomato. These two were acceptable, though nothing to write home about. The salads were basic but good. The bread was fresh. There is also excellent Welsh rarebit, served compliments of the house. With two beers, and two coffees the bill came to LE41.

But for that price we whiled away an entire afternoon. There is far better food to be had, at a similar price, elsewhere in Alexandria. But you do not go to the Elite just for the food. You go to while away the time. And there is nowhere better to sit and just watch the world pass by, which is what the Elite is all about. Alexandria would be a poorer place without it.

The Elite, 43, Safiya Zaghloul Street, Alexandria. Opposite Cinema Metro. Tel: 482 3593

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS

1. Room divider (4)
4. Outhouses (5)
10. Wrap, jumbled (4)
14. Dueling sword (4)
15. Paves (5)
16. Reverberation (4)
17. Negative contraction (4)
18. Impetuous beginning (5)
19. S. American flightless bird (4)
20. In the very act, hyph. wds (9)
22. Modify (5)
23. At all times (4)
24. Onassis' pet name (3)
25. Three consecutive letters of the alphabet (3)
28. Dutch cheese (4)
30. Membrane at back of eye (5)
34. Melody (4)

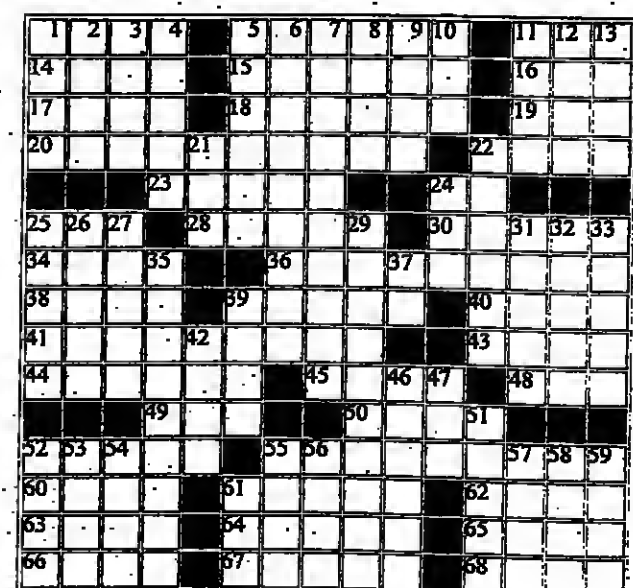


Last week's solution

36. A linguistic branch of the Aztec dialects (9)
38. Symbol; mark (4)
39. 26 Down jumbled (5)
40. Time, jumbled (4)
41. Repute; grandeur (9)
43. A Scandinavian (4)
44. Backtrack (6)
45. Opening (4)
48. Comb. form "bed" (3)
49. ...Palmas (3)
50. Malay boat (4)
52. Stuffs (5)
55. Outerskin (9)
60. Affection (4)
61. Strained stew (5)
62. Nation; dash (4)
63. So be it (4)
64. Type of heat (5)
65. A double curve in architecture (4)
66. Saucy (4)
67. Name of Desert Fox (5)
68. Small thin person (4)

DOWN

1. Dam used to regulate flow of water (4)
2. Large polygonal recess (4)
3. Advance (4)
4. River of forgetfulness, mythology (5)
5. Lepidated (6)
6. Obstacle (9)
7. Otherwise (4)
8. Eoterprise; act (4)



9. Supersonic transport, abb. (3)
10. Granted; licensed (9)
11. Pain (4)
12. Adv. of interrogation (4)
13. Motorway (4)
21. Hail (3)
22. Locality (4)
24. Lords-and-ladies plant (4)
25. More vile (5)
26. Felony; depravity (5)
27. Finger (5)
29. Refuse of pressed grapes, pl. (5)
31. Epic poem (5)
32. Child's nurse (5)
33. Poker stakes (5)
35. Abolition (9)
37. Part of a stocking (9)
39. Taverns (4)
42. Geological times (4)
46. Trying experience (6)
47. Part of 27 down (3)
51. Feathered shaft (5)
52. Applaud (4)
53. City on the Tiber (4)
55. Certify (4)
56. Pertaining to a continent (4)
57. Wise men of the East (4)
58. Frost (4)
59. Dribble (4)
61. By (3)

While a sense of the past is restored in Giza, elsewhere the city's modern architectural masterpieces are being demolished

A view from within

Those who still feel a shiver run up their spine when they listen to *Majnun Laila* will no longer have to rely solely on the powers of their imagination: not only will they have the chance to wander around Ahmed Shauqi's bedroom, office and library, but they will have access to every article and book ever written on the great poet. Last week Mrs Mubarak presided at the inauguration ceremony of the Ahmed Shauqi Museum, just next door to the recently opened Mahmoud Khalil Museum. Both houses have been renovated with a view to providing new spaces where art aficionados can meet and browse; both are furnished with an eye to their original occupants.

The Ministry of Culture took the initiative of converting Shauqi's house into a cultural centre. In the words of Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni, renovating the former Shauqi residence was an essential step towards reviving the cultural atmosphere in which the poet moved. Such renovation efforts are also aimed at encouraging the young generation of writers, painters and directors to interact in spaces more inspiring than the cultural forums currently available — mainly coffee shops and art galleries. Attached to the museum is a criticism and creativity centre, which includes workshops where writers of short stories, novels, poetry and criticism can meet regularly, discuss their ideas and meet with prominent writers. The centre also features units devoted to seminars, experimental works, documentary filmmaking and plastic arts, as well as a library and a music unit. According to Dr Ghali Shukri, prominent critic and the head of the centre, the workshops and various units are a means of linking Egyptian cultural activity with new global artistic trends. The centre will also help to revive the cultural atmosphere throughout Egypt by co-ordinating activities with cultural palaces in the different governorates.

But the renovation of the Ahmed Shauqi house is also part of a current trend — as yet relatively tentative — towards the preservation of nineteenth and early twentieth-century architecture in Egypt. Built in 1869, the house reflects the Italianate architecture popular in 19th-century Cairo;

It took more than seven years to restore, but now budding writers and composers — as well as the less inspired — can enjoy wandering through the rooms where the prince of poets read, wrote and dreamed, writes Rania Khalaf



photo: Jihan Ammar

high gates, grand arches and Roman columns, which overwhelm with a sense of the past. To add to the sense of "being there", visitors can contemplate the chair in which Shauqi sat to write his immortal poetry, a chaise-longue (where he awaited inspiration, perhaps?), or his large four-poster. Afficionados can also pause in the room where Shauqi died in 1932. That night, he summoned a servant before retiring and asked that his relatives gather; he felt death approaching. His daughter and two sons are still very present: their pictures hang on walls throughout the house. The drawing room is Louis XVI; but Khadiga, the poet's wife, preferred Ottoman trappings for her quarters. The concern she lavished upon her surroundings is evident in the tapestry hangings, engraved verses from the Qur'an and elaborately carved columns and arches.

Although he worked at the palace, Shauqi could not bear ceremonial regalia, and obtained the special permission of Khedive Abbas to attend ceremonies in ordinary garb. But his sense of splendour, although it did not extend to his personal dress, is distinct in his surroundings. Al-

though more than fifty years have passed since his death, renovation works have succeeded in preserving the style Shauqi and his wife had created, to such an extent that the poet seems on the verge of popping his head around the door. In his office, rows of rare tomes reveal his interests: history, religion, philosophy, fine arts, and literature. Unfortunately, the poet's own collection of books are not available for visitors' leisurely perusal. Instead, two rooms on the first floor have been converted into a library where works on Shauqi and other classic poets of the 19th century are arranged.

The room in which Mohamed Abdel-Wahab used to live has been similarly converted according to the spirit of its former occupant — it is now a hall where one can listen to the compositions of Abdel-Wahab or Shauqi and summon up the vision of the two giants, toiling away in the very same place. Some of Shauqi's manuscripts are exhibited in another room,

while further on, the poet's medals are displayed, as are the gifts presented him when he was decreed Prince of Poets on 29 April 1927.

The renovation work, and plans to transform the house into a cultural complex, started in 1989. But the story goes back to 1973, when the late president Anwar El-Sadat issued a decree of purchase for LE85,000, affiliating the house to the Ministry of Culture. In 1977, the Shauqi residence was opened to the public, but was closed again for extensive renovation in 1989, due to problems in the sewage system. Ideas for ways in which to expand the activities now offered abound: Inam Abu Mandour, the new museum's manager, suggests that the museum should be listed in tourist guides in order to attract a wider audience, especially among tourists from the Gulf countries. She also suggests that an annual poetry competition be arranged on the level of the Arab world.

Hamdi Khalifa, head of the engineering

sector at the National Centre of Plastic Arts, said that the house's unique dimensions were taken into consideration during restoration of the interior in order to properly convey the atmosphere of the poet's life and surroundings. Ahmed Nawar, head of the National Centre for Plastic Arts, pointed out that the Ministry of Culture has undertaken a promising plan aiming at preserving the history of national figures by converting their houses into museums. The plan entails restoring the houses of the national leader Saad Zaghloul, painters Mahmoud Taha and Effat Nagi, and writer and critic Taha Hussein. The uniqueness of such museums is that they also serve as cultural compounds, providing foci for cultural activities. In his capacity as the head of museums sector at the Higher Council for Antiquities, Nawar added that a comprehensive project is underway, at a total cost of LE332 million, aimed at establishing a host of museums which may

serve to acquaint people, "and especially the younger generation, with the national figures who contributed to the development of our society."

This plan could avoid that decisions like the one to destroy Um Kulthum's house (her descendants had it razed and a tower erected in its place), an issue which raised much controversy. Intellectuals and artists argued that it was the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture to preserve the heritage of figures who, like Um Kulthum, carry enormous symbolic weight in the national consciousness. Nawar commented that, while he was not in charge when that incident occurred, artists have now become far more aware than previously of the importance of donating their properties to the Ministry of Culture.

So the renovation of the Shauqi residence seems to be part of a gradually accelerating trend. The Mohamed Nagi (1888-1956) museum, first established in the early 1960s, a few years after the painter's death, was recently re-opened on the site of the artist's atelier on the Cairo-Alexandria highway. Restoration work, which began in 1990, included extending the building and developing the site. The museum includes two spacious halls where 450 sketches, 79 paintings and 38 photos belonging to the painter and his family are exhibited. In an effort to recreate some of the original atmosphere, Nagi's paintbrushes are also on display, as are some of the medals and awards he received. Attached to the museum is a small library where the painter's personal collection of art books is housed. A workshop in applied art and painting for children will be organised under the museum's auspices; other activities include an annual seminar on Mohamed Nagi himself. "The activities are not enough. But the problem is that the museum is located far from the centre of town," says manager Ali Ghoneim. Students from nearby schools provide the bulk of the visitors, he added. Hopefully, distance should not prove too great a deterrent, and the Shauqi residence, located in the midst of the hubbub, yet facing the calm of the Nile, is a pleasant alternative in the meantime.

photo: Yves Paris

Last breath of history

Modern Cairo's architectural history is being erased, writes Dina Ezzat, and conservation efforts are practically nil

Architecture is a city's living memory. Unfortunately, during the past 25 years, Cairo's memory has slowly been burning in an inferno of destruction. Critics complain that efforts to conserve the remains, so far spared from the boulders of demolition, are all but non-existent. Architectural masterpieces erected in the late 19th and early 20th centuries for Cairo dwellers by such modern renowned architects as Gutzwiller's Julius Grunz, France's De Cured Del Rosso, Italy's Antoine Lascise, Belgium's Ernest Jasper and Egypt's Mustafa Fahmy Pasha have been consistently demolished since the 1970s. Exquisite palaces, villas and three-floor apartment buildings were replaced with new high-rise buildings that lack the most elementary aesthetic values.

Many masterpieces of Cairo's last golden era of architecture were built during the reign of Khedive Ismail from 1863-1879. These included the old opera house, which burned down in 1971, and the Gezira Palace — now the centrepiece between the twin towers of the Marriott Hotel. Ismail built his city in the heart of Cairo, bordered by El-Ezbekiya gardens and Abdin Palace to the east, the Nile to the west, 26th of July Street to the north and the People's Assembly to the south. The last phase of this era was the construction of Heliopolis, started by the Baron Empin at the turn of this century. Throughout the 1930s, the Baron's city was enlarged by dedicated architects whose last testimonials still stand at El-Ismailiya Square.

Responding to the concern of local architects over the cancerous destruction of the city's modern landmarks, Cairo governorate recently issued a decree stipulating that all apartment buildings with a distinct architectural style should only be demolished if they are in danger of collapse. Previously, a similar decree was issued with the purpose of preserving Cairo's villas and palaces.

But worried architects argue that such decrees are simply useless. "A decree does not have a binding legal nature. It is not a law," said Salah Zaki, vice president of the International Union of Architects. "Look at the number of buildings that have been knocked down since both decrees were issued — decrees are not the way out of this problem," said architect-decorator Ayman El-Qasbi.

Indeed, Cairo Governorate officials admit that at least one investor was granted a demolition permit for an old apartment building since the second decree was issued some three months ago. Architects claim that at least a dozen villas were demolished since the governorate announced its first decree for residential buildings some three years ago.

"There are so many ways of getting around those decrees," El-Qasbi said. In a typical scenario, an investor interested in making large profits would fraudulently obtain a certificate declaring the building unsafe. "Alternatively the owner would damage the building, leaving it to collapse," El-Qasbi added.

Concerned officials interpret the decrees on the preservation of Cairo's modern architectural heritage to mean that not every building with "an old-fashioned style" should be saved. According to Rifqi El-Qadi, chairperson of the Committee of Architectural Styles of Cairo Governorate, the decree is intended for "unique buildings". In El-Qadi's words, "a building that has several replicas is not considered unique".

Salah Lamie, chairperson of the Centre for the Revival of the Islamic Architectural Heritage, says the decrees do not offer a holistic salvation scheme

for the problem at hand: "They simply fall short of properly diagnosing and addressing the ailment."

According to Lamie, who is responsible for the restoration of a long list of historic buildings, the problem is both the decreasing value of and decaying environment around these buildings. The potential profits from a single apartment in Zamalek or Heliopolis are certainly enough to make any landlord forget about the architectural value of an old building that could be replaced by a building with 30 apartments.

"Just by knocking down the building and selling the land, a landlord could make a fortune," said El-Qasbi. The run-down infrastructure in some parts of the city only exacerbates the condition of the neglected buildings. Meanwhile, the miserably infinitesimal low rents most landlords get mean that even the most culturally-conscious landlord would not hesitate to compromise architectural value for profit.

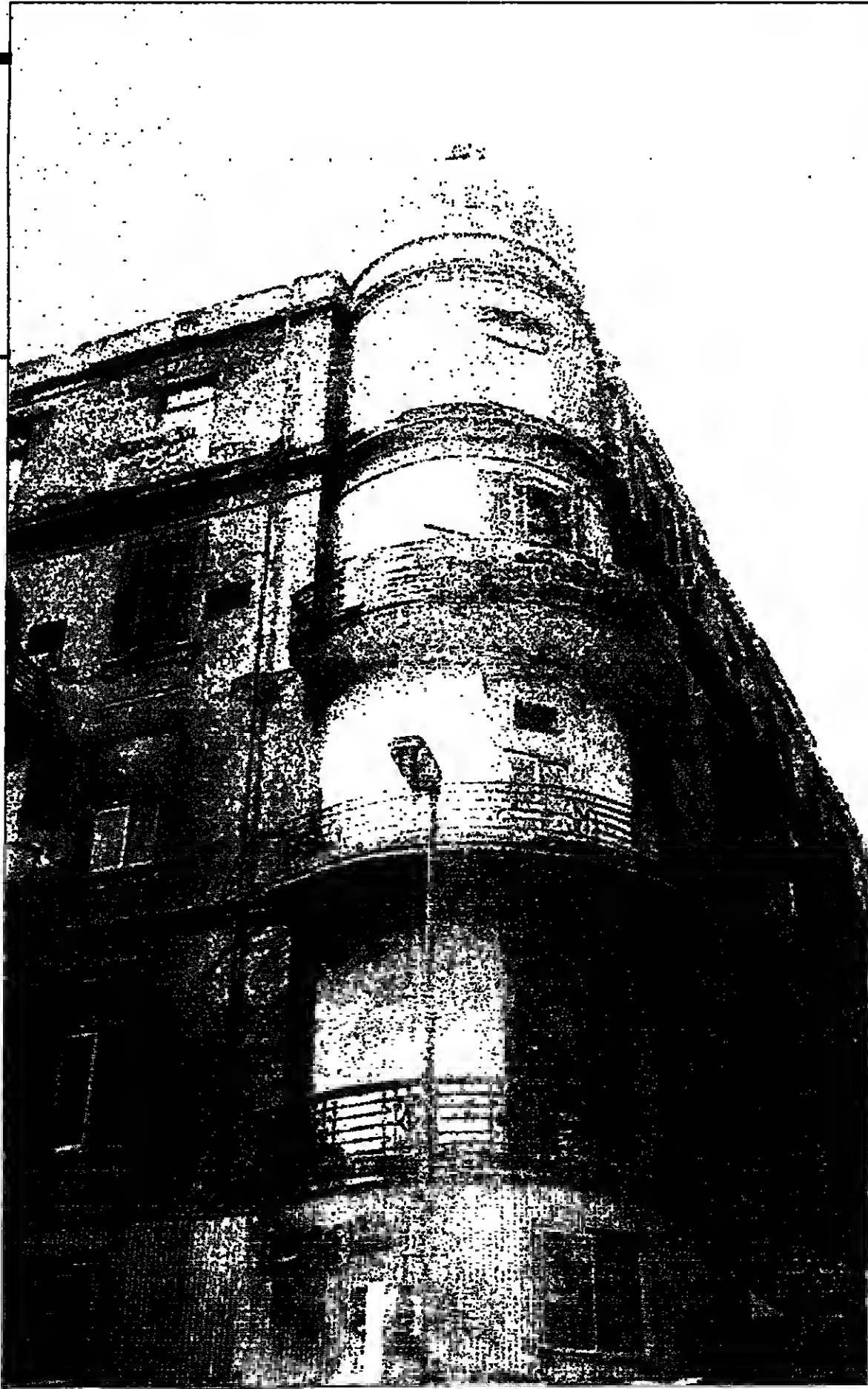
"It is like a bus running down a hill without any brakes," said one alarmed downtown Cairo resident. According to his testimony, before and after World War II "Cairo looked like Rome. It was as beautiful as Paris. What is happening now is murderous."

The golden age of Cairo witnessed the construction of eclectic types of architecture. These included the highly-ornate Baroque style, the multi-arched Gothic, the fine-lined Art Nouveau and the simple-geometric Art Deco.

Most buildings constructed during this time also had both overt and covert lines of Islamic architecture. "This is especially evident in the years between 1900 and 1952," said architect Hind Nadin. "It was a period that witnessed a reaction against Westernisation in general and this was reflected in the architectural styles of the time." Nadin confirms that it was specifically the Mameluke style of architecture that was reappreciated in the buildings of the early decades of the century. However, given that architects were then building for more modern functions, their revival of the Mameluke style was primarily decorative. "The Mamelukes did not have banks; so when architects built banks in the 1920s, they had to borrow the plans of the West and re-introduce the facades of the Mameluke buildings," she said.

The large variety of architectural styles of Cairo makes the city similar to a museum which helps any architect appreciate the different schools of design," said Hossam Seif El-Yazal, professor of the history of architecture at Helwan University. "It is such a pity to let them fall into disrepair when you know you cannot build anything like them," he lamented.

The high calibre of masons and craftsmen who constructed these sophisticated buildings is now extinct, making these treasures irreplaceable. Massive budget problems are another handicap. "A plain four-floor building with two apartments on each floor on a lot of 400 square metres may cost



The end of the golden era: can Cairo's past escape the invasion of the tower-blocks?

LE650,000. The cost would rise to LE1 million at least if the architect were to construct a building of the Art Deco or Art Nouveau variety," El-Qasbi said. Architects agree that nobody would be willing to spend that much money.

"Every time a building is knocked down, a part of Cairo's history is lost forever," Zaki said. Stylish building in Cairo gradually came to a halt after the 1952 Revolution. While some blame the revolution for inhibiting the further development of archi-

tectural style, others believe that the Republican regime was too busy building the modern state and securing national territories to worry about constructing nice villas for the rich. According to Lamie, "The bottom line is that conservation should be quick and unequivocal."

The first step towards conservation is to immediately halt destruction. "There has to be a law that makes it commercially unprofitable for a landlord to replace these buildings with high-rises and sky-

scrapers. This can only be accomplished through levying large demolition fees," El-Qasbi suggested. Meanwhile, landlords should be given alternative money-making channels.

"For instance, if the government asks a landlord not to demolish an architectural masterpiece, it must compensate him with a piece of land outside of the architecture-protected zone where he can build a new building to make money," said Zaki.

But it is not enough to simply stop the destruction — maintenance is equally crucial. "There is no point in suggesting that the government should do this, because it is economically impossible," Lamie said. "What we need is a conservation fund for these buildings. It should be within the jurisdiction of this fund to raise the money needed and provide technical aid for the restoration of these buildings."

"Even if a fund is too difficult to launch, then at least there has to be a consultative committee of some sort," El-Qasbi suggested. The main purpose of this committee should be to guide any restoration work. "Take the example of buildings in Heliopolis that were given a facelift when the ground floor was bought by chain restaurants or retail stores — the final result looks as visually disturbing as a badly-iced cake," El-Qasbi criticised.

These complaints are not new. Previous efforts to start a fund or a committee have been lost in a maze of bureaucratic handicaps that would deter even the most enthusiastic conservationist from trying again. And many worry that without the proper government-delegated authority, such a body would be just another incapacitated non-governmental organisation.

Such factors prompt architects to emphasise the supreme importance of documentation. "If you know you are going to lose it, then the least you could do is to document it," El-Qasbi said. So far the most serious documentation effort has been made by the Architecture Department at Al-Azhar University. Zaki, the head of the department, pushes his post-graduate students to work hard on cataloguing the remainder of the city's architectural heritage. "We started some three years ago. And so far we have only managed to document 50 buildings. But we believe that there are at least some 5,000 buildings in Cairo that need documentation before they are levelled," Zaki said.

Documentation must include the method and date of construction, the original plan and style of the building, the history of restoration and facade treatment in cases of renovation. It also must provide some practical information about the name of the owner and the history of the building. "This is not an easy task. It takes time and money to get this work done, but most of all, it takes much effort to convince landlords and tenants to give this kind of information," Zaki explained.

The architectural topography of Cairo is changing by the hour. The city's population in the good old days of Khedive Ismail was 600,000. Today, the mega-city and its suburbs house some 20 million people. Even the most optimistic architects believe that it won't be long before every architectural treasure becomes a new apartment building devoid of any aesthetic value.

Complementary Lines:

Cocks crow and metal clanks

Once again Helen Miles and Jaroslaw Dobrowolsky take to the streets, this time to describe a modest medieval monument

After a visit to the towering complexes of Qalawoun and Barquq, the School of Amir Mithqal, sketched here, seems like a homely affair. It is entered by a flight of stairs at the end of a side street off Muezz Liddin Allah Street in Islamic Cairo. This is because the school, built in the 14th century to propagate the tenets of the Shafi'i rite, is suspended — for reasons best known to itself — over a tunnelled alley.

Anyway, Mithqal was a bumbler man than the lines of Qalawoun and Barquq — a mere eunuch in the royal household of Mohamed Al-Nasir's daughter, Princess Tatar El-Hegaziya, whose job was to tutor the young Mamelukes in the ways of warfare and leadership. The building has a cosy, sitting-room feel to it. The wooden ceilings beneath the inset second-storey students' rooms are painted in soft Art Deco colours. Their windows are screened with mash-rabiyah (wooden latticework), the doors leading upstairs are of thick cedarwood strengthened with brass strips.

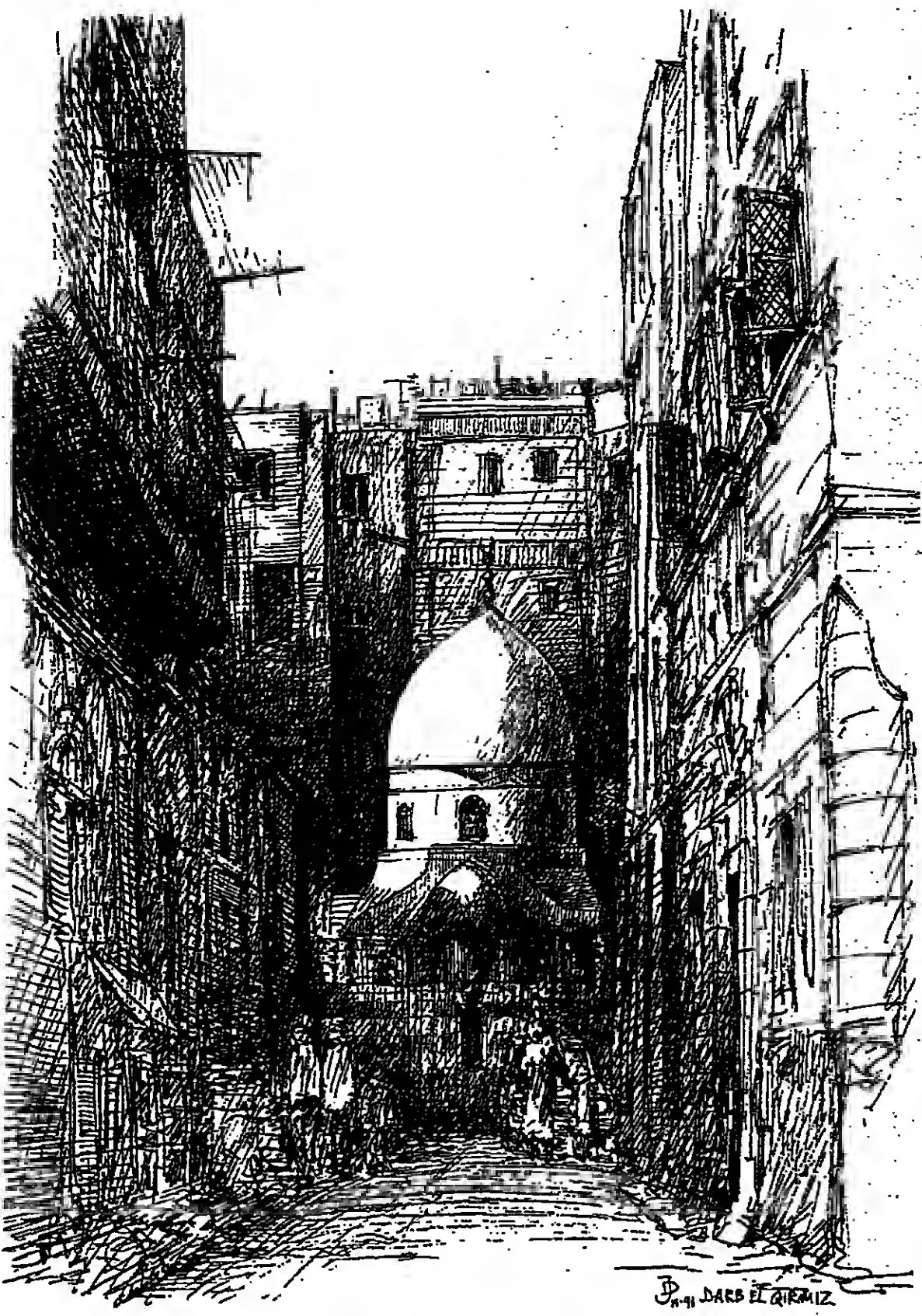
The sounds of cocks crowing and the rhythmic clank of metal workers drift in from the street, making the outside world closer and more immediate than is felt in the larger, grander edifices whose walls insulate and isolate.

The building has twice been restored in recent years — once by the French Committee to Conserve Arab Art Monuments at the beginning of this century, and again by the German Archaeological Institute in the 1970s. The latter left a plaque to that effect in the entranceway.

Today, the monument represents a mixture of not so genteel decay and medieval kitsch. The shards of colour from the stained glass windows are as bright as fair-ground lights, but the plaster walls are stained and chipped.

The coloured marble patterns on the mihrab (prayer niche) almost come to life in one of those optical illusions: if you stare at them long enough, they will produce shapes and figures. On the other hand, the shallow covered area opposite the sanctuary still looks like a building site with broken pavings and labourer's tools scattered around.

You can reach the School of Amir Mithqal by taking a right at the second alley after the Barquq complex. It is immediately recognisable on your right by the tunnel and stairs.



AS CHRISTIANS in the West celebrate Easter next Sunday, Copts in Egypt will mark Palm Sunday, the day Jesus entered Jerusalem riding a donkey and was cheered by frond-waving followers, according to the New Testament. Egyptian Copts will celebrate their own Easter on 14 April. Differences between calendars explain why Western Christians and Copts celebrate Jesus' resurrection one week apart.

This early 19th century oil painting of the crucifixion of Jesus, by an unknown artist, is now on display at the Coptic Museum in Cairo. Police confiscated the painting in Rafah in 1992 from a Palestinian who was trying to smuggle it out of the country. After restoration work was carried out, it was exhibited at a museum in Zagazig, capital of Sharqiya Governorate and finally transferred to its present location early this month.

The painting measures 148 x 255cm.

Seasonal sale at bourse

Tourism companies marketed Egypt at the 30th International Tourist Exchange in Berlin from March 9-13. Sherine Nasr tallied up the results

The International Tourist Exchange is reputedly the most important event in the business. The purpose: for the private sector to sell Egypt to tourists and fill up vacancies for the winter of 1996.

The bourse has gained popularity since its debut in 1966, when Egypt was one of the five participating countries. This year, it accommodated no less than 5,237 exhibitors representing 174 countries and hosting 120,000 visitors, who shuttled between the pavilions by bus.

The Egyptian pavilion stretched over a 564sq. m. area to accommodate 39 exhibitors, among whom were the major hotels, a number of Nile cruises and 19 private tourist companies.

"It is a very useful event for those involved in the tourist business," said Nadia Lamie of

Amenophis Tours. In 1995, 81 per cent of the visitors to the exchange bought packages during the event. Moreover, 50 per cent of the participating companies, including Egyptian travel agencies, managed to sign contracts for more packages.

According to Dr Farid El-Qadi, a regular participant since 1973, what matters most are not the contracts signed on site, but rather the opportunity to meet with worldwide peers in the tourism industry. "The more contacts a tourist company can make, the more business it is likely to do during the year," he said.

Nadia Lamie explained that EgyptAir, international hotels and private sector companies collaborate to produce the best offers. "The company

that managed to provide the cheapest prices and the best programme had the lion's share of profits," she said, reporting that EgyptAir offered a 5 per cent discount on its domestic flights for those who purchased Egypt tour packages. The discount granted to tour operators selling Egypt abroad was even greater.

An ideal package included an eight-night tour — three in Cairo and the rest in Luxor, Aswan and the Red Sea area. Considerable care was also given to promoting desert safaris in Sinai to German adventure travellers.

This year's statistics also revealed that 25 per cent of holiday makers in Germany have developed a strong tendency towards culture tourism and sightseeing. "This means that Egypt's share of Ger-

man travellers will increase further," said El-Qadi.

Environmental issues ranked high in the market's agenda this year. "Environment was actually the cornerstone of the market's programme," said El-Qadi. For two days, seminars were dedicated to discussing the impact tourism has on the environment, the role tourist sectors can play to preserve it and the means to reduce tourist density in some environmentally endangered sites. "This is the real challenge set before Egypt now, namely, to strictly preserve its natural and historical heritage," said El-Qadi.

At the exchange, the Ministry of Tourism targeted the main markets that export tourists to Egypt: Germany, England, Italy, France, the US and Japan. The Egyptian Tourist Authority distrib-

uted a brochure on Egypt in seven different languages.

The Egyptian wing was designed to accommodate huge Pharaonic replicas. The daily *Berlin Morning Post* reported that "Residents of Berlin and their guests were spellbound by the Egyptian kings. Visitors of the market and vacation seekers sought travel brochures and small gifts."

Large slides depicting different Egyptian cultures — Pharaonic, Graeco-Roman, Coptic and Islamic — decorated the wing. A group of German university students, dressed in Pharaonic costumes, played music in front of the wing. On-site promotional campaigns included a folkloric performance by an Egyptian dance troupe and free open buffets, courtesy of the exhibiting hotels.

Journeys in silence

A group of deaf tourists from Germany might not have been able to hear about the wonders of Egypt, but with a little indulgence, a tour guide helped them out. Rehab Saad lent him an ear

During the day, tour guide Ziad Anwar faced the sun. In closed areas and at night, he lit his mouth with a torch.

The tourists asked him to shave off his moustache. They would then be able to read his lips with ease. He did.

This was 25-year-old Anwar's first such experience. "Dealing with any handicapped tourist is difficult," he says. "It requires a lot of preparation and a special way of dealing."

Twenty-five deaf German tourists spent two weeks travelling through Cairo, Giza, Luxor, Aswan and Sinai and Ziad Anwar was their guide. Organized by a German association for the deaf, the group was made up of people who had once been able to hear.

Knowing that he wouldn't be easily understood, Anwar printed a booklet describing the monuments and places they would visit, and distributed it on the first day of their trip. "I also had to talk slowly in German, clearly and in simple language," he says.

But he wasn't on his own: the group's tour leader from Germany assisted Anwar in his task, translating his words into sign language, and some of the tourists were hearing-aids.

In the mornings, Anwar and the tour leader would go door-to-door, with the help of master keys, "because they could not hear the wake-up call," he says.

Crowds also presented a problem. Once, some of the tourists got dispersed:

"They couldn't hear me so I ran after them and tapped them on their shoulders," he recalls, and he directed them to the rest of the group.

During the group's climb up Mount Sinai, Anwar bled someone to walk at the front while he remained behind, making sure the group stuck together.

These are among the preparations made by Anwar who had once before hosted a group of blind tourists. They, in turn, had taught him about the importance of using

group's Luxor-Aswan cruise, he thought they wouldn't enjoy the *galabiyah* party because they wouldn't be able to hear the music. But they danced from beginning to end, moving to the vibrations their bodies felt as loudspeakers blared the music.

And then there were some misunderstandings that were just laughed off: when the group stood at the gates of Medinet Habu on the west bank of the Nile in Luxor, Anwar said the word "Habu". Someone responded, "Oh, we'll have some, referring, rather, to 'hamburgers'."

But he does feel that he's developed a certain knack with tourists who require a different type of tour and he has noticed some surprising differences. On the normal tour, he says, the bus is always quiet and the guide does the talking. In the case of the deaf group, he says, "The guide doesn't talk at all and the tourists chat with one another (by moving their lips and uttering sounds in the process). They speak in very loud voices and the bus starts to resemble a marketplace."

Tourism for the disabled is not yet developed in Egypt but Anwar feels that it has great potential. He suggests that specially trained tour guides, documentary films, photos, video tapes and other aides be made available to tour guides like himself.

Now, if there are any disabled people in groups, he feels "an affinity towards them" and tries to make their trip even more enjoyable than might be expected.



Deaf tourists travelled throughout Egypt

Monuments for restoration

FINLAND has offered the Supreme Council of Antiquities LE11 million to survey Egypt's ancient sites. Part of the grant is earmarked for the registration of ancient sites and the production of a restoration plan.

Luxor investments

MAJOR projects will soon make their debut in Luxor at a cost of \$475 million. They include a \$75 million "fun house" stretching over 250 feddans and several casinos at a cost of \$100 million. Also on the list of investments is a medical spa for businessmen, a tourist village for the disabled and one for the display of Pharaonic, Nubian, Bedouin and agricultural life. Finally, golf enthusiasts will be able to practice their strokes on a 250 feddan stretch of greenery.

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Ruud's soccer blues

One thing the Egyptian national soccer team are good at is frustrating their fans, writes Ahmed El-Said. And it was business as usual at the International Emirates tournament

The arrival of the controversial Ruud Krol as head coach of the national team revived Egyptian dreams of football glory. But dreams, of course, don't always come true, and the dreary litany of failure continues unabated. Weeks after their enormous defeat by Zambia in the African Nations Cup, Egypt was upset once again in the friendly International Emirates tournament, a competition which they won in 1994.

In three games, Egypt scored only one

goal and conceded three. Their fate was probably sealed by the loss of a crucial first match against Morocco by two goals. Stunned by defeat and their opponent's superior strength, the team could not figure out a way of making a comeback. And where was Mr Krol in all this? According to his words of wisdom vis à vis the team's prospects — "Do not expect results for my team until 1998" — we really shouldn't be surprised at their poor performance. But bear in mind that the Egyptian federation

pays a monthly cheque of \$25,000 to the dutchman, who in return promises absolutely nothing — at least not for two years.

The match against Morocco was really all over in the 11th minute, when Larash drove a powerful free kick into the back of the Egyptian net. For more than an hour the Egyptian players ran after the ball, but were unable to stop the Moroccans from adding another goal, which they did with considerable ease.

Meanwhile, the UAE was enchanting its home supporters with a comfortable 3-2 victory against the powerful Koreans. And in their second match, the UAE played a very physical game to stop the Egyptians. Lacking in experience and confidence, and stunned by the heavy rain, Egypt kept possession for much of the time, but could not maintain the necessary concentration to convert possession into a goal. As the final minutes approached, Hossam Hassan, the Egyptian captain, produced one of his fa-

mous fights to force the referee to end the game four minutes before time.

The Koreans then played an excellent match against Morocco, rich in technique, tactics and goals (two for each side). With only one point from two games, the Egyptians were desperate for a victory by now. But their next opponents were Korea, and the strong Korean team were not about to let that happen. For more than an hour the Egyptian strikers failed to produce magic. The Koreans meanwhile found the net four

times, but the goals were disallowed as offside by the Japanese referee. Then, two minutes before the end, Egypt had its glimpse of glory as Ahmed Abdel-Moneim added his name to the score sheet with Egypt's only goal. The thrill was short-lived. In 30 seconds the Koreans replied with an equaliser, and the match ended in a draw.

In the final match, UAE snatched a well deserved victory against Morocco to consolidate their rightful claim to the trophy.



Farid Simaika, founder of diving in Egypt, in a rare photo in 1939 from the archives of Mustafa Rady, manager of Zamalek's pool.



El-Rawi (in) among the judges in Sixth All Africa Games 96

Olympic countdown

Lighting the torch

THE SYMBOLIC torch of the 1996 Summer Olympics has been lit in Greece, in a ceremony drawing on ancient tradition. An actress dressed in the costume of an Ancient Greek high priestess lit the torch from a flame sparked with a harnessed-steel mirror. The torch, made partly of Georgia pecan wood, was carried by a runner into Athens' ancient stadium, opening a relay that lasts for 111 days and ends in Atlanta at the 19 July opening ceremony.

Sino-American exchange

US AND Chinese officials have announced a landmark programme to exchange coaches, athletic teams and technical, scientific and medical knowledge. The agreement takes effect immediately, but US Olympic Committee officials said they did not think the exchange would take place until after the Atlanta games. The memorandum of intent was signed last Thursday night, on the first day of a three-day trip by Chinese Olympic Committee members to the Olympic Training Centre in Colorado Springs. It is the first time China's top Olympic officials have visited the home of the US Olympic Committee.

Algerian detained

LESS than four months before the summer games, the new chief of Algeria's Olympic committee has been detained on corruption charges. Last Monday the Algerian Ministry of Justice announced the arrest and detention of Mustafa Berraf, a former star basketball player. In a statement, officials said Berraf was being held in Boufarik, 40km south of Algiers, on charges of "diversion and dissipation". Algeria boasts of two of the world's top middle-distance runners, Noureddin Morceli and Hassiba Boulmerka. Both are top contenders for Olympic gold.

"Ludicrous" lawsuit

TWO yachtsmen's lawsuit against the Australian Yachting Federation (AYF) in an attempt to bring about their selection for the Olympics has been described as "far-fetched and ludicrous" by barrister Desmond Fagan. Fagan was making his final submission in the case, in which John Forbes and Darren Bundock are suing the federation and Fagan's clients, Mitch Booth and his partner Andrew Landenberger, seeking priority in selection for Atlanta. Justice Kim Santow reserved judgment and said he would make a ruling as soon as possible.

Asia's soccer tigers

SOUTH KOREA will go to Atlanta as Asia's number one in soccer, following their 2-1 defeat of Japan in the finals of Asian qualification for the Olympic football tournament. Saudi Arabia booked the third place after defeating Iraq 1-0. The three teams will join five teams from Europe, three each from Africa and Central America and two from South America.

Qu runs again

CHINESE world 1,500m record holder Qu Yunxia is stepping up preparations for the Atlanta Olympics with the help of coach Ma Junren. The 24-year-old, not seen in international competitions since the Asian Games in November 1994, was expected to make her comeback at the Beijing Event in February. But Ma decided not to enter her, arguing that she had not reached her top level. However, she has been tipped to make a new world record in Atlanta.

Making waves

The price of success, says Ismail El-Rawi, is commitment. Over 50 years of diving, coaching and winning, writes Nashwa Abdel-Tawab, haven't proven him wrong

For a diver, making a splash upon entering the pool is one of the most fatal mistakes he can make. Yet Ismail El-Rawi, at the height of his career, did just that — and became famous for it. After one year of training, at age 17, El-Rawi won the School Championship and the Junior Championship and then went on to join the Ahli Club's diving team instead of the one at his school, the Fouad I High School.

El-Rawi's first accomplishments took place in 1946, just before the start of Egypt's golden age of diving. These first sure-footed steps into diving fame coincided with those of several high-diving giants like Raouf Abul-Seoud, Ismail Ramzi and Kamal Ali Hassan, all medalists in the 1948 Olympic Games. But it was from 1951 to 1959 that Egypt truly achieved prominence in the world of diving. Ahmed Kamal Ali won the gold medal in the 1951 Mediterranean Championship, Ahmed Fathi Shahad won the gold in the same competition in 1955. Ali Mohib succeeded them in 1959. All of these divers, along with Mustafa Hassan, won medals in the 1951, 1955, and 1959 Olympic Games.

For an aspiring young diver like El-Rawi, this was all the incentive that was required. "I'll never forget the first school medal I ever won in diving,"

he recalled. "It was given to me by King Farouk. I can still feel with the same intensity the pride I felt upon receiving it from him. In many ways, this was what helped me to decide to make diving an integral part of my life."

It was all uphill for El-Rawi after the initial victories. He won the 10m high-dive competition in the World University Championship in 1955 while in his last year of study in pharmacy school. That day, however, proved to be a turning point in his life. Troubled by the fact that he wanted to pursue his diving career and embark on one in pharmacy, El-Rawi opted for the latter, making the University Championship his first and last international competition.

For the next 10 years, his love for the sport led him to compete in local competitions while pursuing his career in pharmacy. Careers, however, have a strange way of choosing you instead of you choosing them. This was the case with El-Rawi. Dissatisfied with the local competitions, in 1966, when he was selected to coach the national and military diving teams, he jumped at the offer and held this post until 1978.

"I loved the idea of making champions out of young divers," he stressed. Loving something, how-

ever, is not always enough to make it flourish. But couple love for a sport with skill and what you have is a prescription for success. From 1966 to 1972, under El-Rawi's tutelage, the military diving team cleaned up in four consecutive Military World Cups. Some of the divers, who trained under El-Rawi, such as Wagih Abul-Seoud and Ahmed Hassan, went on to have extremely successful diving careers, winning medal after medal in various international swimming and diving competitions.

Behind every successful athlete or coach is yet another athlete or coach. So who does El-Rawi look up to? "Farid Semeika," he replies with no hesitation. "He was the one who introduced diving in Egypt. He lived in the US, but came back to Egypt to represent it in the 1928 Olympic Games, and won the gold."

El-Rawi is now waxing poetic, recalling his own past and how he, too, was a diving pioneer in Egypt. Semeika formed Egypt's first diving team and founded the Zamalek club's first diving team. His philosophy was to produce champions and so is mine. He was instrumental in laying the foundations for Egypt's golden age of diving. I like to think that I'm doing something similar," he stated.

In more ways than one, he is. While he was

coaching the military and national teams, he was selected to be an international referee. Since 1966, he has been judging international and local competitions, his latest being the 6th All Africa Games in Zimbabwe. The dedication and determination with which he has approached the task of judging competitions is equal to his zeal as a diver and a coach. Why? "It's the nature of the sport," he says. "Diving offers both the divers and the spectators a thrill and a measure of self-satisfaction. The divers, once they have executed a perfect dive, can't help but be satisfied and elated. The spectators are happy to have been present to witness the dive and the coach's pride is justified upon seeing all the hours of hard work come together in a single, perfect second."

That second of perfection, however, takes a tremendous amount of effort and commitment on the part of all involved. As a diver and a coach, El-Rawi is well aware of this. "To win, you have to work slowly and carefully, but with a great deal of perseverance and discipline," he said. For his divers, however, this message is nothing new. They have living proof of this creed in the form of a 65-year old coach who is still doing backflips off the high-dive.

Winner lose all

Despite their defeat in the finals by Egypt, the UAE's snooker team went on to qualify for the first Professional and Amateur World Cup. Eman Abdel-Moeti reports

You could have cut the atmosphere in the Ramesses Hilton's billiard hall with a knife at around nine o'clock last Saturday evening, as the stage was set for the final of the Middle East qualification matches for the new Professional and Amateur World Cup. Around 150 chain-smoking spectators, packed into a room designed to hold no more than 65, added to the tension, as did the fact that the UAE and Egypt had been more or less neck and neck up to this point in the competition. The UAE had a record of unbeaten frames, while Egypt had lost one, but the scores of both teams were close.

The match turned out to be a nail-biting marathon, the players taking five hours to finish the nine frames. With the last one from Egypt's Maged Shafiq, the absorbed silence of the crowd broke into a victory roar in celebration of a 6-3 win for Egypt.



Amr Essam lines up a shot

photo: Medhat Abdel-Meguid

Alan Chamberlain, would choose the final winner on the strength of the final game. But instead they decided to have one player from each team play another frame. And the outcome was in the UAE's favour.

The spectators finally emerged from the smoke-filled hall at 2am, slightly less exhausted than the players, who had been playing almost continuously for a two-day period. When the excitement and disappointment, had died down, the question

on the lips of many involved with snooker was: why did the WPBSA organise the tournament according to the round robin system rather than the usual 'best of seven' formula? "We thought this was the fairest way to see which was the strongest team," countered Chamberlain, who commented that he had seen some top quality snooker in the competition.

So the UAE will be heading for Thailand and the World Cup, with its 400,000 pounds sterling prize money. It will be a great opportunity for them, and for the qualifier from the Far East zone, to gain experience with European professionals like Steven Hendry and Steve Davis. Credit should go to the WPBSA for their decision to give amateur players from the Middle East and Far East a chance to compete with professionals, and for selecting Egypt to host the qualifications, a decision which has been widely seen as a gesture of compensation for their refusal to allow Egypt to host the last world championship.

Edited by Inas Mazhar

Lisez dans



□ Jeux olympiques
30 Egyptiens à Atlanta
□ Supplément spécial
Chirac au Caire

- Nomination du mufti
Vent nouveau sur Al-Azhar
- Fayçal Al-Husseini
Autorité totale pour sécurité totale
- Entretien avec Youssef Chahine
Un film sur la pensée lumineuse d'Ibn Ruchd
- Al-Faouakhir
Nouvelle sur la bataille d'un potier de Foustat



Rédacteur en Chef

Exécutif

Mohamed Salmawy

Président

et Rédacteur en Chef

Ibrahim Nafie

Awatef Abdel-Rahman:

Front page

Intellectual fads come and go, and few academics swim against the current. But although she has not tried to temper the tang of her convictions, issues are not labels: she does not like -isms. Her students know that journalism has everything to do with the nitty-gritty



Photo: Sherif Soudki

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Her voice was warm over the telephone, suggesting that the tension of a first meeting would be quickly overcome by a woman who does not stand on ceremony. The impression was belied by her particularly strong presence. She is taciturn, capable of being highly diplomatic, but the cutting edge, the glint of steel, is there. She looks trim — younger than the black-and-white photographs published in the newspapers fifteen years ago, just after her release from the women's prison in Al-Qanater.

Abdel-Rahman was arrested in mid-September 1981, charged with spying for the Soviet Union, along with university professors Latifa El-Zayyat and Amina Rashid, among others. The women were members of the Committee for the Defence of National Culture. The committee was formed of prominent intellectuals and public figures who opposed the 1978 Camp David accord with Israel. Abdel-Rahman and the others were acquitted after President Sadat's assassination.

In prison, she formed close friendships with the women, especially those with whom she shared a progressive orientation. Like Latifa El-Zayyat, she kept a diary of what she calls "the one hundred-day ordeal", which she is currently preparing for publication. The experience seems to have left her unscathed — if anything, she has more self-confidence.

A professor of journalism and the head of the Journalism Department at Cairo University's Faculty of Mass Communication, she was the first Egyptian to undertake extensive research on African journalism. The impersonality of her office — beige wall-to-wall carpeting and leather armchairs — gives nothing away. Only a mask brought back from Kenya last year provides a clue. An array of greeting-cards decorates the small side-table by her desk — mostly from former students, congratulating her on the Sultan Al-Uweia award which she received for her contributions to the social sciences.

But once the conversation grabs her, the strict demeanour of the professor of journalism softens somewhat. She cuts through all the issues favoured by the lounge-intellectual set: cultural authenticity, theory versus secularism, feminism... The fads do not interest her: historical materialism as a method of analysis may be denigrated by intellectuals right, centre, and even left, but she has not lost her conviction that class struggle is the dynamo of history.

She talks of the middle class losing its material and moral edge, of lower-income groups sinking below the poverty line. She is concerned with the dispossessed and with women — with the forgotten backwaters of the Sa'id where she was born.

In the fifties, at university, her political consciousness was formed in the petri dish of pan-Arabism. She belongs to the generation of leftists who "believed in the liberation movements of Africa and Asia". They were "critical of the orthodox left", a position manifested most by their opposition to the Soviet Union's support of the 1947 partition plan of Palestine.

She obtained her MA in 1968, writing on the role of the media in the Algerian revolution. Her Ph.D. thesis, completed in 1975, dealt with the different orientations manifested in the Egyptian press regarding the question of Palestine between 1922 and 1936.

Politically, she remained, she says, "to the left of the left". She joined the Tagammu Party, and was persistent in her opposition to peace with Israel. She was the party's candidate in the 1984 parliamentary elections in Assiut, her home province. She did not win, but she did gain a deeper knowledge of the constituency of her birth.

Thus far, she would appear as the epitome of the committed intellectual, combining political action with theoretical work. Not quite: for Abdel-Rahman, who spent a spell at Al-Ahram as a journalist, academic interests have overridden both journalism and political activism. She has published sixteen books on the media of the South, the socialist press, and the problems of cultural and media dependency. She made inroads into the hitherto little explored terrain of nascent African journalism, "providing literature for the student in this field where previously there was none," in the words of the veteran professor of journalism, Khalil Saabeh.

She is patient and persistent in her denunciations of the degrading images of women presented by the media, and obtained the consent of Cairo University's Faculty of Mass Communication last year to establish a research centre designed to train media personnel in dealing with issues related to women and development, focusing especially on the neglected rural areas.

After a conference on the African media in Nairobi, where she held a brainstorming session with Mustafa Tolba, then head of the United Nations Environment Programme, she introduced a course on media and the environment on the curriculum of the Faculty of Mass Communications.

Latifa El-Zayyat seems in sum it up: "constant movement from one project to the other is what has always characterized her."

Pack of Cards

So much to say, such little space to say it in. But even a woman such as myself deserves a break every now and then. See you next week.

Abdel-Rahman takes the administrative duties which so many professors consider a chore, to be avoided if at all possible, in her stride; this is the third time she has held the journalism chair at the Faculty of Mass Communication. She believes university professors should be trained to administer, but that many lack the knack to do so.

In El-Zarabi, Assiut, her birthplace, she raised funds and the village's first girls' school was built on a plot of land donated by Abdel-Rahman's mother. She oversaw a research project in two Egyptian villages, El-Zarabi, in Upper Egypt, and Kamshieh, in the Delta, the outcome of which was the establishment of the first women's association, the Society for the Care of Women and the Environment, in El-Zarabi.

When she visits El-Zarabi, she wears traditional clothes, like her extended family, and slips into the characteristic accent of the Upper Egyptians. She also makes a point of visiting the nearby monasteries, although she is saddened that what was once a natural, unconscious bond with Copts now needs to be asserted. As a child, she recalls, the names of Coptic and Muslim women were often the same, and as one put the title *Khalidi* (Aunt) before the name, she often believed Coptic family friends to be relatives.

Despite her active concern with women's issues, Abdel-Rahman has distanced herself from the "feminist movement" in Egypt. She is categorical in expressing her scepticism: what exactly, she demands, have the "rush to the Peking conference on women, the committees and the meetings" done for the 90 per cent of women who remain illiterate? Did all the finessing of policy points solve the problems of the young Egyptian women married off to older men in a desperate attempt to escape poverty?

She lives downtown, on Masrouf Street, with her mother, Bahiyya Fahmi. The two are close, Abdel-Rahman's relationship with her father was far more tenuous. Her mother is open-minded, and has always had wide-ranging interests; this is not the case for most women of her generation. She wrote for various newspapers under a

pen-name and encouraged her children to read and to frequent the second-hand book market in El-Ezbekiyya assiduously. Family relationships are equally warm between Abdel-Rahman and her son, Hisham, as well as her three step-children. She particularly influenced her step-daughter Inas in her progressive politics and her interest in African studies, which she pursued as far as a Ph.D.

Abdel-Rahman is constantly on the move, travelling internationally. She has participated in coordinating many of the 90-odd conferences on media, development, and African issues she has attended. She was elected vice-president of the Nairobi-based African Council for Communication and Education (ASCE) in 1992.

Her interest in Africa has gained her a particularly wide network of contacts there. Drawn to the liberation struggles of the African peoples, she became interested in African journalism at an early phase in its development, and became increasingly involved as new freedoms were fought for. She has visited 36 African countries, and cites the late Augustino Neto, Joshua Nkomo, and Nelson and Winnie Mandela among her friends. Ten years ago she formed a society for the defence of Nelson Mandela, and, after his release from prison, coordinated Cairo University's awarding him an honorary doctorate.

Many who know Abdel-Rahman well say she has tried to live in a way consistent with her beliefs. Others see her as eminently pragmatic, adapting to the exigencies of an academic career while avoiding the risks of political action.

Some of her students view her with trepidation: unequivocal in her likes and dislikes, they say, she is strongly convinced of her own worth. For others, she has been a thought-provoking professor, opening up new avenues of thought and instilling vitality in academic work by relating it to society's tangible problems. Few would differ as to her personal resilience, and her avoidance of intellectual self-contradictions.

Profile by Aziza Sami

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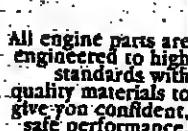
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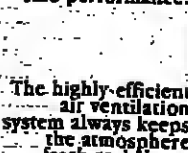
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